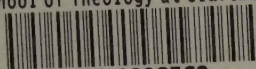


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WALKING CIRCUMSPECTLY

J. A. BEAUMONT



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Walking Circumspectly;

AND OTHER SERMONS.

PREACHED IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,
ST. JOHN'S WOOD ROAD,

BY THE REV.

J. A. BEAUMONT, M.A.

(INCUMBENT).

"I think that wise men wish their religion to be all of this kind, teaching the agent to go alone, not to hang on the world as a pensioner, a permitted person, but an adult self-seeking soul, brave to assist or resist a world: only humble and docile before the Source of Wisdom."—*Emerson.*

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THE GREAT MEMORY
OF
MANDELL CREIGHTON, D.D.,
SOMETIME LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

NOTE.

Every possible excuse has already been advanced for the publication of a volume of Sermons. I shall not, therefore, tax my own ingenuity or the patience of my readers, should there be any, in an endeavour to find new ones. Of course these Sermons are published by request—Sermons always are. This is a fact which, at first view, may create some slight feeling of surprise: but really it is quite obvious and natural, when one reflects how easy it is for any preacher to acquiesce in the friendly suggestion that his labours are entitled to a wider recognition than they have hitherto enjoyed. The suggestion, indeed, is not originally offered or accepted in quite this form; but the public, who accord to Sermons a kindly toleration, will easily recognise that this is the substance of it. It is quite possible, one must admit, that what presents itself as only an amiable suggestion is really a subtle temptation in disguise. If so, the fact that yet another clergyman has succumbed to it should help to dispel the prevalent superstition that the clergy have nothing in common with the laity.

It has been my aim, in these Sermons, to correlate the essential verities of the Christian Faith with such facts and tendencies in current life as a clergyman is in a position to observe. I venture to hope, therefore, that they may, in some sort, be found to be in sympathy with the thought and feeling of the times. But knowledge accumulates so quickly in our days, phase of feeling succeeds so rapidly to phase, that one may find after all that one has been "combating extinct Satans"—in Kingsley's phrase—under the impression that they were living and rampant monsters.

If, however, I have failed in this constructive aim, I trust that I may be absolved of any destructive intent. Here and there, possibly, a phrase may occur which to the conservative mind will appear dubious. But what then! Disraeli's satirical apostrophe to the political Conservative party of his young days—"What will you conserve? Everything that is established so long as it is a phrase and not a fact!"—might not unjustly be applied to that religious conservatism which regards orthodoxy in faith and worship primarily as a valuable hostage for the continuance of the State Establishment. The Church of England is beginning to learn that her present sufferings are, in large measure, the legacy of a past which was actuated by a too exclusive devotion to the letter at the expense of the spirit of faith. If religion languishes among the thoughtful and well-educated it is, to a not inconsiderable degree, because, under the restrictive pressure of an antique phraseology, they have allowed themselves to regard the phenomena of the Church's spiritual order as unessential survivals.

But if any seem in bondage to the past, he forges his own fetters; the Gospel is free under "the law of the spirit of life." Phrases, theological as well as political, may become outworn—but principles remain, and principles are penetrating. To discover under the ancient forms the essential principles of the Church's life—Continuity, Unity, Personality—and then to trace out these in their secular action as they envelope all organised being within the Divine synthesis of which the Incarnation is the centre—this is the task the Holy Spirit sets enlightened faith.

These Sermons are not related by any external link of thought; but perhaps there may be discovered in them an internal unity which belongs to a reverent recognition of these Divine principles.

J. A. B.

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Sermon I.

WALKING CIRCUMSPECTLY.

EPHESIANS V. 15, 16, 17.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

"ECAUSE the days are evil." A Christian Apostle writing from Rome during the principate of Nero might well be excused for a momentary lapse into pessimism. The brutal pomp, the moral squalor, the intellectual starvation of imperial rule; the material splendour, the grinning irreverence, the overwhelming superstitions of this the earliest stage of pagan decadence: all these combined to produce an atmosphere of hate, fear, degradation, and folly which might well overwhelm the soul of one whose mission it was to establish the rule of the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Love. An acute observer of men and manners, a convinced believer in the necessity for systematic enquiry and

accurate information, St. Paul does not content himself with incoherent general denunciations of the times, but in the fourth chapter of this Epistle presents the Ephesian Church with a lucid analysis of the life around him. That life, he says, the general life of the Gentile world, is mainly characterised by aimlessness, ignorance and impurity. So far as it may be said to have had any general standard, it raised the banner of moral anarchy ; it suffered an almost total paralysis of mind, heart and will ; to use his own pregnant phrase, it was "past feeling." Yet in this wretched world wherein he lived, where Christianity made little or no way, where only a few obscure persons would listen to his preaching ; where the "unsearchable riches of Christ" are represented by a few starved rootlets of spiritual truth, planted, here and there, in poverty-stricken patches of human ground ; in this unlovely, unpromising world, the Apostle never loses his power of hope, never loses his sense of proportion, never loses his head. He sees God's will being fulfilled ; he sees good working itself out of these evil conditions ; he sees the manifold wisdom of God developing itself on this side and that. He is instant to convince the world of its errors, but he is not in a hurry ; he is faithful without fuss. And the faculty by which he sees all this and *is* all this, is the faculty of spiritual understanding.

And as he is, as he thinks and sees, so would he

have his beloved Ephesian children, be, think, and see; his soul's state must be theirs. What must be their attitude towards the life around them?—for the life that surrounded him in Rome was, in kind, all one with the life that surrounded them in Ephesus. Well! since there was a sharp opposition between the standard by which they now lived, and that by which others lived and they had discarded, since they hoped to oppose the ignorance, aimlessness and impurity, with intellectual quickening, righteousness and holiness, they must first of all walk accurately, *ἀκριβῶς*, by rule. They were like men who had saved themselves, by some miracle, from the peril of a foundering ship; and because there was always a danger that some of the insidious tides or currents of life might draw the frail raft of their faith back into the general vortex; because of the moral tension produced in their souls by the loneliness, danger, and vast untrodden distances of the new course, they must walk accurately, watchfully, eyes on the compass.

But (and here follows a piece of advice which will never lose its preciousness while men are conscious of the opposition between the world and the Church, the actual and the ideal) they must walk not only accurately, by rule, but circumspectly; looking all round the horizon, noting the shifts of the winds, the state of the sky, the position of the stars, taking

in all the conditions. In navigation it is often necessary to quit one's course for a time, or at least to do so apparently; in order to go forward one has to go sideways. Dependent for progress on the wind, "which bloweth where it listeth," you can only go approximately in the direction you wish to follow; you must trim your sails to catch the wind as *it is* and steer as close as you may. It is perfectly useless to leave the tiller and let your ship come up into the wind, while, with sails furiously flapping, you fall to arguing that it *ought* to blow from another direction; and if you attempt to go direct into the wind's eye, you bring yourself to a standstill. All this is folly. To drop the metaphor, in plain language, St. Paul's advice to the nascent church at Ephesus was, "Uphold a high standard for yourselves in your own minds, but—*learn to understand the world in which you live.*"

He knew what would be the spiritual temptation of that little beleaguered garrison of idealists, holding the fort in the name of their great Captain. It would be to issue in a desperate sortie and throw themselves at the stony pitiless face of that monstrous pagan civilisation; to tear and rend its smiling, sneering features, their souls aflame with righteous ardour; hewing and cutting in the name of the Lord, till they fell back beaten, overthrown, wounded by their own violence, scattered like leaves before the

autumn wind. This would be heroic but it would be folly, and the great Captain's cause must not be compromised by folly. A man need not necessarily be a fool because he was religious, faith and hope were no enemies to common-sense; they must keep their heads, and not be fools before the Lord.

The days were evil, true; but just ~~because they~~ ^{they} were evil through and through, because the disease was so deep-seated, it was useless to attempt a cure by some major operation of a heroic surgery; rather they must trust to a wise and patient treatment to expel the poison from society's veins. Just because they *were* evil, there was only one way to deal with them. They must ~~redeem the time, that is to say,~~ buy up the opportunity ~~(for this is the force of the Greek),~~ by their patience, by their longsuffering, by their faith that God was working out His purposes, by their hope for the future of humanity. They must learn to think of themselves not as desperate leaders of a forlorn hope, ~~issuing against the world in all the heroic foolery of waving pennons and trailing plumes,~~ but ~~quietly,~~ as sober merchants going about their business in the market places of the world, entrusted with precious wares, ~~but not loudly proclaiming them—~~ ready to buy as well as sell, to learn as well as teach.

As they learnt to walk circumspectly, taking a comprehensive view of the world as it was; watching

the play of interests, noting the delicate sequences of cause and effect, seeing the reasons of things, getting their facts in a proper order and proportion; so would they learn to recognise the fit opportunity, the right moment, to put in circulation some of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." They must not set out with any pre-conceived notions of some prescribed course, for the wind of the Spirit, by which alone they could fill their sails, "bloweth where it listeth." They must not even be in thrall to the dictates of individual consciences, for conscience after all, is a part of self and there was no room for egotism in the wise conduct of *their* business. Rather they must leave themselves free to understand what the will of the Lord is in any particular circumstance. Little as it might seem to deserve it, they must respect their world, for no one could reform the world who did not first respect it: even as He Who refused to be made "a ruler and judge over men," Who said of Himself that He came not "to condemn the world, but to save the world."

Such was St. Paul's advice to men who had to hold themselves erect in their own regard, and yet stoop to deal with the wickedness of a wicked society. Unexpected perhaps, as coming from one of his religious ardour; unexpected in its blunt suggestion that what passes for religion is often no better than folly; sounding perhaps a little cynical in the ears of

those who consider the association of worldly wisdom with religion as a reproach. And yet most healthy in its common-sense, most sane in its practical view of the world, most balanced in its discrimination between the proximates and ultimates in life, most wise in its understanding of the Lord's will.

II. "Because the days are evil." The days are always evil in the sense that there is always evil to be found if you look for it; and particularly because as the Christian conscience develops it grows more sensitive to evil, more aware of its essential nature, so that what was not recognised as evil in one age is known for evil in another. If the evil is not so glaring on the surface of society as when St. Paul wrote from Rome in the principate of Nero, it is, of course, by no means eradicated. Morally as well as physically, it is only the surface of this planet that is cooled of its primeval ardours, so that higher types of life can breathe on it; inwardly it still sullenly glows with deep abiding fires.

Still the Church, while preserving unsullied the inherent dignity of her faith and hope, must be touched on all sides by a general life alien in many ways to her own Divine Philosophy. Still she must deal with life and the evil of it, faithfully, perseveringly, understanding what the will of the Lord is. The question is—what is to be her method? Is she to act in the spirit of the crusader or in the spirit of the merchant?

Is she to throw herself at the head of society—fulminate, threaten, shake her fists? Or is she to do as St. Paul's advises,—walk circumspectly, quietly, about the world's market place—not concealing her business, but not advertising it, wisely watching for her opportunity, ready on the instant to redeem it?

Clearly there is a considerable difference between these two methods, and it is really a matter of some importance, both to the Church and to the world, to determine which is the fitter of the two. Particularly is it important just now, because there is amongst us a very articulate, not to say vociferous body of religious opinion which insists that the relations between the Church and the world must be settled solely by the dictates of the individual conscience. Everywhere this claim is insisted on—in the pulpit, in the newspaper, at the hustings. It is really quite surprising how conscientiousness is developed by an absence of rubrics. And this conscience is of a very fiery and aggressive order; it not only minds its own business, but everybody else's as well, and it does not hesitate to flay sinners for their good. Surprising demands are made in the name of conscience. The most astonishing protests, the most intricate objections are raised on its behalf, so that history seems to be repeating itself in the shape of a Protestant Inquisition, in which the black-coated pastor takes

the place of the bare-footed friar, and flames of eloquence play around the heretic's soul in place of the more material fires which formerly scorched his body.

Well ! our lives are individual lives, our character an individual character, but though nothing may be so precious to the individual Christian as his conscience, at the same time there is a great difference between individuality and mere individualism in religion. The way we see a thing, the form in which it came to us, is not necessarily the only or even the best way in which it can be thought or expressed ; not necessarily the only form in which it is fit to live. To believe otherwise, to believe that you can force the world to take the view you want it to take by flying in its face and blackening its eyes, is mere folly. That is one of the differences perhaps, between belonging to an ancient organisation, deriving its traditions from a past co-eval with the rise of modern civilisation, reflecting in its life many minds, many views, many types of character, and belonging to some more modern body, instituted to preserve some particular view of religion, where men are necessarily very much of one mind, develop a sort of similar general character and view life in very much the same sort of way.

Ruskin, in his "*Fors Clavigera*," has a passage bearing on this intensified view of the rights of conscience, which seems apposite.

“It has been a prevalent notion in the minds of well-disposed persons, that if they acted according to their own conscience, they must, therefore, be doing right.” “I must do what *I* think right.” How often is this sentence uttered and acted on bravely, nobly, innocently; but always—because of its egotism—erringly. You must not do what *you* think right, but, whether you or anybody think, or don’t think it, what *is* right. “I must act according to the dictates of my conscience.” By no means, my conscientious friend, unless you are quite sure that yours is not the conscience of an ass. “I am doing my best, what can man do more?” You might be doing much less, and yet much better; perhaps you were doing your best in producing, or doing, an eternally bad thing. All these three sayings, and the convictions they express, are only wise in the mouths and minds of wise men; they are deadly, and all the deadlier because bearing an image and superscription of virtue, in the mouths and minds of fools.”

Now this seems a hard and doubtless, to many minds, a scurrilous saying. But really it is only an expansion of St. Paul’s advice, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise . . . *understanding* what the will of the Lord is.”

The fact is that moral idealism always has a tendency to outrun its own strength, and while conducting an earnest crusade in favour of the possible,

ignores the probable. And then, when the world wags on as before, it is apt to break out into an exalted invective which may be a little due to the irritating feeling that a slight has been offered to its good intentions.

The etymology of the word "fool," which St. Paul does not hesitate to use in connection with the possible methods of godly folk, is significant. The etymological dictionary tells us that it is derived from the Latin *follis*—windbag—and so comes to mean a man who pours forth copious words, flatulent, unseasoned, lacking wisdom. Very differently would the Apostle have his spiritual children conduct themselves. In a passage very similar to the text, he says, "Let your speech be always gracious, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man": as though a man who is truly moved by the Holy Spirit to speak of spiritual things, would exhibit in his speech, a point, a freshness, a vital briskness, a charm, the outward signs of that holy, vivifying, bracing presence. Isaiah, that great inspired patriot, reformed his world with epigrams.

Religion never loses anything by urbanity, politeness, good breeding in its professors. The faith of Christ is in itself so charming a thing, that it ought to reproduce some of its own charm in the faithful believer. The religious man, really in touch with his

Lord, ought to be a charming man. There is nothing the world appreciates so much, nothing works such wonders. St. Francis de Sales and Savonorola both had an equal zest for souls. But while one was most fervently loved, the other was most fervently detested: while the former died peacefully in his bed amid the sighs and tears not only of his own diocese, but of the whole Church, the latter was burnt amid the plaudits of the populace. St. Francis walked circumspectly—Savonorola, in spite of all his splendid goodness, did not. If it had not been for spiritual charm there would never have been any Christians. For does not the Holy Gospel itself attest that “they wondered at the *gracious* words which proceeded out of His mouth”?

So then, if we would do our Master's work in the world according to the best method, His own and His great Apostle's, we must above all things cultivate the grace of spiritual understanding. Spiritual understanding—what is it? The late Bishop Creighton describes it in a delightful passage.

“By understanding, he (that is, St. Paul) means what we may call perception, intuition, insight; knowledge accompanied by a certain mental alertness and quickness which enables a man who possesses them not only to have the knowledge, and not indeed to be primarily interested in applying it to any particular thing, but to have the knowledge in such a

shape that he takes it with him wherever he goes; he verifies it, he vivifies it by his own experience. He applies it to everything which is passing. He sees glimpses of its truth in everything that occurs. His knowledge is with him that it may be experimentally used on all sides; and therefore he has perception; therefore he has intuition; therefore he has insight. He sees and understands what is happening, lives himself and his own life again continually in the current of life that is going on around him; detects what he feels and perceives and understands; sees things, lays hold of them, follows them, tracks them, catches the line of thought that is passing through another mind, sees the wave of feeling that is passing over multitudes of men, perceives it, identifies himself with it, knows it and knows how he stands in relation to it. This is a dim description of the process that St. Paul means by spiritual understanding."

What the Bishop called his "dim description," opens out to us the heart of a very precious truth; namely, that if we would act on men for their good we must first try to understand them as they are, realise their motives, follow their line of thought, see their point of view. God's work in the world is frequently better done by self-repression than by self-assertion however conscientious it may be; by the discovery and exposition of spiritual principles, rather

than by the local application of a half-truth in the wrong place. A power in reserve, seen through the atmosphere of a large humanity which surrounds it, is often more impressive, for human purposes, than the same power bound down to the uses of the workshop by a mechanical mind versed in the technicalities of righteousness. It is fashionable to denounce, and, judging by the columns of denunciation in the press, it must be paying; but just because it is the fashion we should be in no haste to adopt it, and be rather suspicious of its utility. General denunciations at long range not only frequently miss the mark, but exhaust the ammunition which might be used with more telling effect at close quarters—if, when we get there, we feel inclined to fire anything but blank cartridge.

Our Lord and Pattern did not deal with men in multitudes, but rather with individuals, and the secret of His power over them was that they knew He understood them. Each age, of course, requires its own methods, and the method of denunciation has been useful at times. But the conditions of our day incline one to believe that the Christian ministry, which for this purpose includes all Christian people, would be more successful in winning back men to the Lord's service if it regarded itself rather as the "ambassador for Christ" than the Crusader of the Cross; using the method of a refined and skilful


diplomacy, rather than the assault of a polemic which is apt to find itself caught on the shield of indifference; walking circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, *because* the days are evil, understanding what the will of the Lord *is*.

Sermon II.

THE WISDOM THAT JUSTIFIES.

ST. LUKE VII. 31-35

“And the Lord said, Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced: we have mourned to you and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber: ■ friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of all her children.”

“ HEREUNTO shall I liken the men of this generation?” With clean sure stroke of criticism He scores through the thick cuticle of their self-esteem. With delicate fine drawn satire He probes the sensitive nervelets of their vanity, till a deep shudder of rage and pain shakes the whole body of orthodoxy and vexes its righteous soul. What are they like—these righteous *men* who set the standard of piety, who sound the note of zeal, whose judgment says the final word, whose proud authority

demands an unreasoning acquiescence? Why, in their blind literalism, their capricious obstinacy, their fretful self-importance and hasty jealousy, they shew all the faults of childhood.

It was a man Who spoke, *the* Man Who knew. The men of His generation, He said, were like children. Those grave, sober men, pillars of the synagogue, men of substance, honoured heads of families, they handled subtle problems and grave realities in the vexed and impatient spirit of children, all on edge over some silly game. Here were new and rich ideas ready to be captured, deep meanings waiting to unfold, but they brush them aside, as passionate children might dash down some exquisite piece of opaline glass. The voice of the wilderness only wakes a chuckle of well-fed disdain, the voice near by in their streets, in their homes, only arouses a pious frenzy at its unconventional accents. John, the man of the day, Jesus, the man of all time, are mobbed and threatened by the little people of the moment—shouting, after the manner of children, their senseless insults, “devil,” “glutton,” “wine-bibber.”

Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation? Jesus represents the disciplined thought, the large view, the sure grasp, the wide judgment, of the real manhood of every age, and what would He say of the men of to-day? Every generation seems to develop

some prominent element of childishness, and ours certainly is not altogether innocent of a cross and wrangling spirit—a proneness to bandy words—a tendency to make fetiches of tattered phrases, and obsolete symbols of things that do not matter. There are many grave problems—social, religious, imperial—many fresh presentations of truth, many new streams of tendency that need to be met and examined in a more careful, mature and manly spirit than many of us are now exhibiting.

But if the men of our Lord's generation saw Himself and His great forerunner, as exponents of utterly dissimilar and mutually exclusive ideas, perhaps there was some measure of excuse for them. For we can hardly imagine two personalities more diverse, two methods of life and work more opposite than those of John and Jesus. The one from the very beginning is separate from common life, remarkable, removed. Born of an exclusive caste, brought up in a priestly household, he carries his separateness into his training. The desert is his school, Nature is his master. Cut off from all the formative influences of example, from all the clinging ties of affection, he learns alone the one deep and abiding lesson of his life. Thence he comes back into the world, perhaps as one almost forgotten, peculiar in dress, strange in demeanour, with a concentrated intensity of purpose—a man with one idea. There is a curious attraction

in this solitary being, bringing with him the mysterious atmosphere of the desert, something ominous, portentous. Crowds gather round him, half attracted, half repelled. He is the typical holy man of the East, as he beats into them his one warning with its persistent refrain, like drumming hoof-beats in wide still places, "Repent, repent."

But what a contrast to all this do we find in Jesus. He is of the people, and lives among them all His days. In childhood, "subject to His parents," in youth and manhood He abides with them as son and helper too. Relatives He has, "brethren" after the flesh, whose claims on His kindness and attention He never ignores. Friends He has—few perhaps—but intimate, as the house in Bethany and the last commission to St. John make plain. He is no professional holy man, there is nothing outwardly remarkable about Him. "Who is this?" said some of those who were little disposed to hear Him—after all it is only the carpenter's son at Nazareth. Those who came to Him were drawn by quite another kind of attraction than that which the Baptist exercised. It was what He was in Himself, the way His mind went out to meet and understand the minds around Him, that extraordinary quality of humanness in Him to which the woman of Samaria bore bewildered testimony when she besought her friends to come and see the man Who told her all that ever she did.

The crowds that come to John are driven to do his will, shaken by the unrelenting force of a clear direct message. In the crowds that follow Jesus, many are set back, and but few are drawn on by the subtle, delicate, attraction of parable.

And all this outward difference between them so marked, so unmistakable, was clearly symbolical of the ends they had in view. John the Baptist came to people sloughed in an endless morass of tradition, ridden with priest-craft. A Levite himself, he knew by experience the numbing soporific power of religious hedonism. He had to wean them from an outward righteousness, which depended on the due fulfilling of forms, to the inward apprehension of what lay behind them. He had to turn their attention from the breadth of their phylacteries to the state of their souls. John the Baptist was a missionary, a revivalist, as we say. His was religious work in the most exclusive sense of that term. He wished to disturb the peace of centuries, which was yet no peace, by creating a storm of religious emotion. The infallible scribe must learn self-distrust, the proud Pharisee, the sceptical Sadducee must feel a sense of unworthiness and humility. All must learn how to look within and recognise there what sin was, because all were presently to be tried by the touchstone of the great reality, "the Kingdom of Heaven" which was "at hand."

But the work of Jesus, though more personal in method and apparently less general in its aim, was in reality infinitely wider in purpose and richer in meaning than the work of John. In the technical sense of the word His can hardly be described as religious work at all. In His teaching, He, the Divine Philosopher, had got far beyond the elementary point of view of the devotee. He dealt with the living realities of things that lie beyond all religions, of which creeds are the more or less imperfect symbols. He Who came to do His Father's will knew it far better than any stiff doctrine or straightened piety could teach Him, and He chose to carry it out in His own way.

And we know what that will was. That deep thinker St. Paul, meditating in his profound way, on all the related meanings of Christ's life and death and Resurrection, has formulated it for us in a phrase of luminous insight, of inspired lucidity. "God made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth." *To sum up*, this was the work of Christ. To bring all the scattered, isolated elements of life, nature and history into union with each other and with God, in bringing them into union with Himself. He was to be the principle of unity,

the co-ordinating principle of a new creation in God. He was to shew by a new and living way, that the only meaning of all this vast universe which could in any way satisfy was to be found in the life of God.

And so where the work of John was strictly religious, the work of Jesus was rather social. While John was inspired by a narrow if exalted piety, Jesus rather showed a sweet and human reasonableness. Whereas John saw men as made for religion, Jesus saw religion as made for men. Asceticism was the note of the one life, fellowship of the other. And with what tenderness, with what sympathy, with what knowledge the Divine Philosopher instilled His Philosophy we know. Nothing in life escapes His view, and He transforms all He touches. Is it Nature in her smiling plenty, or in her mood of black wrath, is it human affections, ambitions, strifes and sins? He shows them all in a new light, where they find a new meaning, a new value. Is He found with the lowly as at the Cana marriage feast, or with them of high degree as at the Pharisee's table? Does He feast with the Publican or mourn with the stricken friend, is He a working fisherman among the disciples, or a learned doctor of law amongst Rabbis, does He enter His royal city in Kingly triumph or does He stand before His judges an undefended prisoner!—wherever He is, whatever He does, there is always a new point of view, a fresh light, a new presentation of

familiar results, a sure grasp of unseen Causes. And over all there plays the sparkling light of a lambent wisdom that pierces shams and dissolves pedantries, breaking out, now in arresting contrast, now in startling paradox.

II. But in spite of all the wide differences in their life and work, these two great ones understood one another. To say that Jesus understood John would indeed be utterly superfluous, but to say that John understood Jesus is surely to realise his claim to be called what our Lord called him, "greatest born of women." He knew that He Who should come would be utterly different from himself. He had the nobility of soul which could recognise the truth in a teaching and way of living that seemed almost the reverse of his own. He had the greatness which understands its own limitations, a complete simplicity which saw no slight to himself in the growing reputation of another, and that entire self-detachment which realises that Truth is greater than opinion. And so John understood Jesus and was content with the answer to his question, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" And we may perhaps reverently imagine that the understanding support of this great man was very valuable and very dear to Him Who was always so much alone among men.

But if our Lord and St. John the Baptist under-

stood one another, the majority of people amongst whom they lived and worked understood neither, for each, in different ways, did violence to two of the leading principles of Judaism. The genius of Judaism makes rather for domesticity than for asceticism. The Jew is penetrated with a very strong sense of racial and religious brotherhood. He loves to celebrate the various holy-days and the commemorations of his faith with family and friendly gatherings. The various ordinances of the law, the numerous intricacies of Synagogue worship—and they are unending—all may be, and often are, made an occasion for the pleasures of the table and of social intercourse. An orthodox Jew often manages to combine a remarkable piety with the appearance of being on very good terms with himself and the Almighty.

Now to those, and they were doubtless the majority, who were penetrated with this comfortable view of religion, St. John the Baptist would appear almost as an enemy. He came "neither eating bread, nor drinking wine." He set his face against their innocent, their hallowed merry-making. He held aloof from social gatherings. He was no brother in Israel. It was incredible that a son of Abraham should live alone like a hermit, when he might marry and settle down comfortably. He was strange, uncanny, almost improper. He must be distraught. He has a devil.

But there is the other side of the picture. An

orthodox Jew if not given to plain living and high thinking is nevertheless extraordinarily rigid about externals. His food must be prepared and eaten in a particular way and after the prescribed ablutions. There are a hundred and one requirements and precautions in which, if he has broken any, a Jew renders himself unfit to join in feast or worship. The fasts are as numerous as the feasts, and each has its prescribed routine, which must not be departed from by a hand's breadth. In fact an orthodox Jew was and is so occupied with keeping himself ceremonially undefiled, that he could scarcely have time for thinking of anything else. Now a large proportion of these minutiae, which were the very life of orthodoxy, our Lord must have disregarded altogether. He kept strange company. He ate with all sorts of unclean people, men of the earth. He did not fast twice a week. He was careless of incurring defilement, and yet He set up to be a Rabbi. He outraged the feelings of the pious and they revenged themselves by calling Him "a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

Now if we enquire what our Lord meant when He spoke to the men of His generation as children in respect of their attitude towards St. John the Baptist and Himself, I think we shall find that His criticism contains a valuable lesson for our own times.

What He meant was this. The people were like

children because they judged things by externals, because they were filled with the spirit of an unreflecting partisanship. His own work and methods seemed to be quite different in aim and scope from the Baptist's, and therefore they were judged to be contradictory and mutually exclusive. There was a John-party and a Jesus-party, and each thought the other was wrong. And beyond these, there was a large moderate party which distrusted both our Lord and His predecessor.

But it was the people themselves who missed the point by insisting on looking at things in their separateness instead of in their relativity. Truth is one and eternal, and the right view was that St. John stood for an earlier stage of that Truth which Jesus summed up in Himself. The moral awakening and religious strictness of the Forerunner were necessary to open heart and mind to the meaning of the broad humanity and the divine philosophy of the Son of Man. John taught the people to know themselves. Jesus carried on that knowledge to a higher plane, and in His own Divine Person taught them how to know God. With a touch of gentle irony, which probably escaped the children's comprehension, our Lord defined the situation when He said, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." The wise man, that is, he who loves truth for its own sake, knows how to seek it, and where to find the higher

harmony into which all its most discordant aspects are resolved.

III. Now in our sober moments most of us are probably ready to confess that there is much that is very childish in our current treatment of religious differences. The Protestant-Puritan mourns and complains that the world has become so careless that he can find few to weep with him over its sins. The mediæval Anglican pipes, and shakes his head over the backwardness displayed in learning to dance new measures, or in re-discovering old ones, and each thinks the other totally and hopelessly wrong. Organisations and societies shout defiance at one another from rival fortresses. Editors dip their pens in gall and wormwood whilst exchanging polite amenities in prints devoted to the maintenance of party watchwords. Clergymen sometimes, and Ministers often, I am told, use the pulpit as an instrument of invective. People of different religious views are shocked at each other's sins of omission and commission. The religious world is involved in a hopeless weary round of strife and bitterness, mostly about externals, of which many have lost their original meaning and some never had much to lose. Sometimes it must occur to us that we are making rather an absurd fuss, but we are all more or less caught up in it, and so are in real danger of missing the whole point of the matter.

It cannot be denied, I fear, that people in all ranks of society are beginning to care less and less for what is called revealed religion. For this there are many causes, some of which we can leave to the slow but sure processes of time to put right. But there can be little doubt that one of them, and a pressing one, is the childish threatenings of parties and sects about words, and phrases, and symbols. Do not let us mistake. Principles we must have, and a man or woman without convictions is but a flabby creature. But let us arrive at them by the right road, and hold them in a spirit of wisdom and charity. We are apt—it seems to me—to make one grand mistake. Absolute truth there is, we believe, in the God-man Christ Jesus, Who must for ever stand as the Supreme Light of the world. But that truth is, in the Gospels, present in germ and is led out in many diverse ways, through the course of the world's history, by the Holy Spirit of God. There is *no* fixed and absolute truth in religious practices and beliefs which have grown up around Him, of whatever origin or colour. Such truth as they contain is purely relative and dependent for its value on some other truth which is expressed in a different way.

“Wisdom is justified of all her children.” Wisdom recognises the divergencies of humanity and sees how different minds lay hold on truth in different

and almost opposite ways. The wise man sees how all these theological and ecclesiastical differences, about which people quarrel and shout, are only varying adaptations of eternal flexible truth to man's myriad needs. He who has begun to *know*, sees there is a place for Cathedral and Meeting-house, for Church and Chapel, for Catholic and Protestant, for High, and Broad, and Low. The truth itself as it is in Christ Jesus is eternally wider than all, but the special formula of each contains such a portion of truth as those who find it convincing can assimilate. There is more in this view than mere opportunism, as there is more than mere self-will in sectional and party differences, and I cannot doubt that all these divergent and apparently opposing ideas of faith and life find their true and necessary place in that larger unity into which the Holy Spirit of God is surely leading us.

So, then, if we would truly endeavour to be followers of our Lord in mind, we must seek to cultivate that spirit of wisdom which was part of our Confirmation dowry. And you will find understanding, not so much in the conscious effort to be broad, as rather first of all in the endeavour to be narrow. Do not be led away into assuming for yourself that flimsy superiority to all creeds and religious positions which is generally only the badge of ignorance, the mark of thoughtlessness. Take rather

your own position, your own views of life, and religious faith. Wherever you stand, whatever you believe, it is no accident, but is in the Providence of God. Get, then, at the truth of your own position, examine it historically, test it by the Gospels and Epistles. See in what relation it puts you with life, with science, with art—see, above all, what power it has over your own life and conduct. Get behind the letter that killeth to the spirit that giveth life; let the kind of faith you profess be indeed truth to *you*, and then will come comprehension, and with it charity and breadth. For your familiarity with, and love of, your own little bit of truth will bring with it deep respect and reverence for the whole vast body of truth, which your mind cannot contain and your view cannot focus. Then it will seem to matter very little to you if one pipes where you would rather mourn, if one weeps when you would dance, for wisdom may have many children and is justified of them all.

Sermon III.

GREAT POSSESSIONS.

ST. MARK X. 22.

“He was sad at that saying and went away grieved; for he had great possessions.”

THERE are few of us, I imagine, who in reading the Gospels, have not succumbed to the fascination which arrests our attention and compels our interest in every line of this little story of the man who went away grieved and wounded by his reception at our Lord's hand. Given, as it is, by St. Mark, whose Gospel is probably the oldest and most original of all the Synoptic narratives, we may feel fairly certain that we have the thing just as it really happened. This little bit of personal history which the simple and faithful art of the Evangelist makes just as fresh and living for us as though we had been eye-witnesses of it is, we feel, a real human document. The scene lingers in the mind and stimulates the imagination. We cannot get it out of our heads: we

return to it again and again, for while it fascinates, it puzzles too. At the very outset our sympathies are deeply engaged by this earnest and sanguine enquirer after truth. In spite of a slight tendency to self-consciousness, there is no doubt that he is a real good fellow; and as we read on, we feel less able to explain to ourselves satisfactorily why our Lord should have put to him a condition which it was practically impossible for him to accept: why, above all, He should have let him go away without a word of explanation, saddened and humiliated.

There is something about it all which we do not understand. We confess to ourselves that, in this case, we have not discovered the principle which underlay our Lord's action. Our sense of social justice is repelled by the notion that no rich man can ever arrive at that supreme fruition of character which is called in the Gospels inheriting Eternal Life; and we know enough of our Lord's mind from His dealings with others to be sure that He meant nothing of the kind. Our own experience of life, and the whole course of the development of society since the day of Pentecost, forbids us to accept the surface explanation that wealth is necessarily excluded from any place in Christ's scheme for the salvation of mankind. Moreover, His own teaching about the providence of the

Heavenly Father for individual lives lands us in a dilemma, if we are to suppose that a man must correct Providence by stripping himself of all that it had supplied him with in order to become a true disciple. We feel sure that our Lord cannot have intended to lay down any such general principle of permanent action: for it is certain that if every rich man, in the present complex condition of society, were to beggar himself in order, indiscriminately, to endow the poor, he would be a bad citizen; and a good Christian is a good citizen all the world over.

If, then, our Lord did not mean this, what did He mean? Somehow we miss the point. All that we know, we say to ourselves, is that this man did what, in all the circumstances, was a singular and remarkable thing for him to do, and met with a return very different from that we should have expected from Him.

Now for many reasons it seems highly important, far more so than it may appear, that we should, if possible, straighten out this mental tangle and fit the scattered pieces of our moral puzzle into their right places. In this way we may get in the unity of the whole incident a fresh view of the mind of Christ. It is just one of those tasks which engaging as it does the powers of our Confirmation endowment should be a delight to preacher and

people alike, and by which, more than ever in these days, the pulpit would seem to be justified of its continued existence. I venture, therefore, with reverence for our Divine Master, to suggest what I conceive to have been the meaning of His relations with him whom He sent away grieved from His presence ; to disengage from the story what appears to have been the principle of His action.

I. Who was he, then, this man who was so anxious to know what he should do that he might inherit eternal life? It is clear that he was well-to-do ; St. Matthew tells us also that he was young ; St. Luke that he was a ruler, that is, an officer of the Synagogue. And if we are to believe his own testimony of himself, he was upright, honest, honourable, and of irreproachable repute. From these details we can not only construct for ourselves a tolerably faithful portrait of the man as he must have been, but can also enter sufficiently into the circumstances of his life to see what was in his mind when he came in all haste and threw himself at the Master's feet with his fateful question.

And, first, we must treat the fact of his wealth with some little historical perspective. He did not belong to a wealthy society like our own, which begins more and more to be permeated with the idea that it is an organic unity, to act more and more on the truly Christian belief that "if one member

suffer, the whole body suffers with it"; to co-ordinate with more thoroughness of purpose, through the effective force of public opinion, the relative duties of the rich, the poor, and the moderately endowed, towards each other and the state.

Israel, what with the barrenness of large portions of the land and the uncommercial character of the people, can at no time have been wealthy, even in proportion to its population. Compared with the great commercial and conquering nations by whom it was surrounded it must have been poor. After the exile the Jewish community in Palestine was actually in poverty, burdened as it was with the tribute to Persia; but always, as we gather from Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, there were wealthy nobles who preyed upon the necessities of their brethren. Even before the end of the Monarchy there had grown up a great class of land-owners who lent money, probably at exorbitant rates, on security of the land, which became forfeit to them when the borrowers failed to fulfil their obligations; and allusions in the Prophets make it clear that wealth had become an instrument of luxury, display, and oppression. Although in our Lord's day wealth had become more evenly distributed, since the nation had now acquired commercial habits and had profited by the growing prosperity of the Roman Empire, still the facts as

to the relations between rich and poor remained relatively unchanged. The rich were under a cloud ; for riches were a synonym for materialism and indifference to the spiritual character of Israel's heritage, and it was chiefly amongst the poor that those were to be found whose hearts were open towards God, waiting in patience for the consolation of Israel. The rich and governing classes, among whom were the priests, had little feeling for the needs of the poor, for there was no public opinion to stimulate sympathy. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that mercy and sympathy for the poor—indeed all real humanity—had been put into the background by an excessive devotion to public worship and the cult of "righteousness." So then, we must remember that this was a society which, in many respects displayed features the exact reverse of what we see in our own.

But if this were the society which bred him, our young man was one of the best and worthiest of its sons. He was rich certainly—but he was young, and his riches had not hardened his heart, nor overlaid his finer feelings with a callous materialism. He was religious, it is true, a man of note in devout circles,—but his pious addiction to the Synagogue Offices had not blinded him to the great hope of that spiritual future which engaged all the best and most earnest thought of his time. All his own

circle were hostile to the new Prophet and made light of His teaching, but *he* was eager to show himself free from narrow prejudice, burning to prove himself "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile." He knew that his life would bear investigation, knew that none could point the finger of scorn at him: he had heard, witnessed perhaps, how Jesus could discomfit unworthy or insincere questioners—but he had no fear, for he only sought the truth.

And so in all the nervous eagerness of his sanguine youth, in all the strength of his clean and wholesome life, he comes, a little self-conscious, a little important perhaps, *running* to Jesus, and throws himself on his knees, breathless and excited, with the words almost tumbling out of his mouth. "Good Master," he cries, "what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" What answer did he expect? Some approbation of his life and character? Not that surely, for clearly he was no poseur, he had good stuff in him. But almost certainly he would expect some welcome as enthusiastic as his offer of himself, an assignment of some task which he was ready to attempt. Whatever he expected, assuredly he did not get it. He must have been checked, almost disconcerted, by the reply he actually received. "Good," said Jesus, in tones which you can almost hear are quiet and reflective in contrast with the others excited

speech, "why callest thou *Me* good? There is none good but One, that is God." You see what is meant. Our Lord never encouraged excited feelings and emotional offers. Devotion to Him must be something more than a mere instinct—it was a reasonable, reasoned service which He needed. His answer throws the young man back on himself. After all, why had he come to Jesus; Who was He? What were His claims, what His nature, what His authority? It was true that no mere man *was* good; but this Man spoke of God as His Father, what then was His relation to God? He was certainly good, that he would stake his life on—was He more than man, could He be divine? That was a tremendous question which he had not been prepared to face; he did not know how to answer, and so remained silent. Without noticing the silence, it would seem, our Lord goes on to remind him of the Commandments, but as though He did not attach very much importance to the reply, for He knew, of course, that His rich admirer was sound there. Here the young man felt himself on firm ground. Commandments! Oh yes, he knew all about them; he knew his duty to his neighbour, and he had always tried, rich as he was, to do it. He had kept the Commandments already, and now he was ready for some really great task; what could he do—he would do *anything*.

Then, we are told, "Jesus beholding him loved him." There he stood in his fresh young eager life, fair to look on; fair within, and maybe fair without; so full of the best reverences, so innocent, so unspoilt, so ready for the highest uses. He was so lovable and so ready to love, he had in him the makings of such a splendid spiritual man that our Lord would lead him on to where he could see, if he would, the higher sort of truth. He takes him at his word. If he is so dissatisfied with his present position, enviable as it seems, so eager for eternal life: and if eternal life is indeed a thing to be won by *doing* something which is within the power of his fine natural character to accomplish; why then, logically, his care for his neighbour, which has hitherto been only negative, must become positive. Let him strip himself to the bone, give all he has to the poor, change all his high estate, and become a wandering beggar. This last supreme act of virtue will win eternal life, if it is to be won, for even Heaven itself cannot hold out against such a worthy son of Abraham.

And the young man? He has been led up to the mountain top, but he has not seen the view. The light is too strong for him, the sun is in his eyes. He stands there for a moment dazzled and confused, with a ringing in his ears and a surging in his brain, as though a thunderbolt had burst over

his head. He sees nothing, understands nothing, save one thing—one dreadful appalling fact. He has been asked to make himself a pauper, and he cannot do it—no! not even for eternal life. A moment he stands, and then all his confidence gone, all his gladness driven out, all his hope quenched, he stumbles out of sight.

II. Now what is the meaning of this? Why did the tender Lord, Who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, deal so hardly with this poor youth? Was it to correct his self-confidence, to put a public slight upon him that he might learn to curb his presumption? Hardly that, for our Lord was no schoolmaster. There can only be one answer. He chastened him thus because He loved him. It was because He saw the good in him that He sent him away to *think*, that He put a whole train of new ideas in his mind. Did Jesus expect that the young man would strip himself at a word? On the contrary, He knew that he would not. Why then did He put the condition to him at all? It was not simply to show him that his legal righteousness was defective in humanity; it was that a little no doubt—but much more in order to help him to see that he was on a wrong track altogether. If eternal life was a thing which could be won by meritorious human conduct: if Heaven could be stormed by a display of virtue—then, no

doubt, an act of complete self-abnegation should win the prize. Our Lord knew, I repeat, that the young man would not and could not be expected to do anything of the kind; but put to him an impossible condition, because he proposed to himself an impossible course. He had got hold of a wrong idea altogether. Eternal life was not a thing to be *won*, or deserved, a sort of good conduct prize. There was no connection between his righteousness and eternal life: the two things belong to a different category, a different order of being altogether. The one belongs to the order of natural society, the other is the end of spiritual processes, which are initiated in man not by any deserving of his own but by the free gift of God. Our Lord here lays down the germ of that truth which was afterwards expanded by St. Paul into a definite statement. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

This must have been the reason why our Lord had, indirectly, bidden the young man ask himself Who He was Whom he had hailed so readily as "Good Master." He would not accept that description of Himself. He would not have one who was so ripe for truth suppose that He was a mere "Good

Master " to be singled out from men on account of a pre-eminence over His kind in virtue and wisdom. If He were only man, then He were not good. If He were indeed good, then He was something more than man: one indeed with Him Who only is good, the Son of the Father, come not to teach us merely, but to beget us to a new state and order of being by the Divine Power which dwells in Him. Eternal life should come to man not as the reward of certain finite acts of omission or commission, but solely as the inheritance of that new nature which, implanted in them through union with the Divine Christ, has in it the seeds of eternity.

So our Lord repels the first mistaken advances of the young man whom He loves, that He might put him in train to comprehend the higher order of truth. He sends him away sad and grieved—not simply because he has great possessions, but that out of present sadness and grief might come later "all joy and peace in believing."

III. Truth is many sided, and our mental and moral limitations are such that, as a rule, only one side of any question is really evident to us at once. And so the course of human history is a perpetual witness of that silent process in which truth is always seeking to awaken the religious sense of humanity to the appreciation of its true proportions. We are constantly struck with the fact that the ideas

of one age seem to disappear altogether, and are succeeded in another by ideas of a totally different order, which in turn hold the field. To minds unused to scientific modes of thought this must always have been something of a puzzle: but we know enough now of the universal rule of the conservation of forces to be sure that it is only thus that each successive generation can pass on to posterity the ever-growing ever-widening heritage of truth.

The rich young ruler who came to our Lord, in common with the best thought of his time, occupied himself with the question, "What can I do to inherit eternal life." True, he may have been mistaken in his estimate of what eternal life meant, or how it was to be gained, but his prepossession was none the less real and sincere. How many people are putting to themselves the question now, so that it becomes the great question of their lives, "What can I do to inherit eternal life?" Very few, I imagine. The most esteemed, the most evident thought of the time is occupied with exactly the opposite sort of inquiry, "What can be done to make this present life happier, more comfortable, more prosperous, more enjoyable?" Men do not need now to be told that they must share their goods with the poor, for it certainly cannot be made a matter of reproach against the rich of our age that they are unconscious of, or indifferent to, demands

on their charity and sympathy. While in a State which, though it remains individualistic in theory is daily becoming more collectivist in practice, the process of the division of goods will, ere long, be automatic.

Now all this endeavour to improve the type of citizenship, to widen the social horizon, to ameliorate the conditions of life for the workers of all sorts is an excellent thing in itself—but it has its corresponding danger. If the men of our Lord's day were inclined to occupy themselves too much with religion, we, on the contrary, almost certainly think too little about it. Never at any time in the history of the Christian world has there been such a strong tendency to put a premium on purely human action, never at any time such a strong tendency to discount the action of God; for never has the power of money to scatter blessings far and wide been so immediate, so visible. - And thus while men have come to believe that there is practically nothing that they cannot do to-day, or will not be able to do to-morrow, they have largely ceased to believe in God having any direct action on their lives at all. Our society, while attractively philanthropic on the surface, is frankly materialistic at bottom, and this probably accounts to some considerable extent for the neglect of religion—for neglect it is, where only one person in four ever join in public worship.

People find that much of what religion teaches about our duties to each other is gradually and almost insensibly being incorporated into the normal practice of the state. This is the real practical part of religion, they say—why trouble one's head about the remainder; what does it matter whether Christ were Divine or no? If a man is a good citizen, a good husband and father; kind, and not obtrusively selfish; honest, upright, and a clean liver, he is for all practical purposes a good Christian.

And so when religion tells a man, conscious of having these great social and private possessions, that they are not all he need be content with or all he should hope for; that there is something immeasurably higher than all of them which constitutes the real secret of his being, he goes away, if not sad and grieved at what he styles religious obscuratism, at all events a little contemptuous and angry. But we cannot afford to do without religion, little as we may seem to be conscious of its loss. For in religion alone, as men's beliefs are now, do we come into contact with the direct action of God. Religion alone keeps alive in us the sense of something, someone, nobler, higher and greater than ourselves, an influence which grows more and more precious in a world saturated with materialism.

The great question which the Church must always strive to keep in the forefront of men's minds is

ever the same, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" for religion concerns itself, primarily, with things which not being seen are eternal, and only secondarily with things which being seen are temporal. And the answer to that great question of the religious man is no longer a matter of doubt; for the Church supplies it in her own ordinances, which witness to the continual development in us of the life of Sonship. If you ask how do Prayer, Worship, the Sacraments, and the study of the Word bring us finite beings even now within the influence of the Eternal, or what is the difference in kind between one who uses them and one who does not, I confess that I can answer you with no logical demonstration. I can only remind you that they rest on just the same authority as that which we claim for our Gospel of social improvement—the authority of Christ. I can only say that if you are willing to salute Him, as practically everyone is to-day, with a "Good Master," you must bear to have Him say, "Why callest thou Me good: there is none good but One; that is God."

But this at least we can say: that if you do not insist on walking everywhere by sight but are content that, for the present, a large area of your life shall yet own the power of faith, you can, by making persistent trial of all that spiritual side of religion, prove whether its claim to build up in you an eternal

life be justified or no. For eternal life is not something vague; on the contrary, it is very definite—progressive knowledge of God—"This is life eternal, that they might *know* Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent."

Sermon IV.

THE ATTENTIVE EAR.

S. LUKE VIII. 18.

“Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.”



IT must, one would think, be ever somewhat of a difficulty to those who deny to Jesus Christ the Divinity of the Son of God, to explain to themselves some of the methods of His teaching. That a Jewish peasant of the decadent days of Jewry should have been able to present to the world a doctrine so alien to his environment, so far in advance of all the influences of his time, so lofty in the grandeur of its moral beauty, so wide in its grasp of human life, so mysterious in its affinity with the hidden things of Nature, is at all events a conceivable proposition. But that this same peasant, with scarcely any education in the human sense, without literary training,

varied study, or any of the ordinary resources which go to form the habit of a cultured mind, should have been able, and should have chosen, to clothe his thoughts in the varied dress of a brilliant and subtle paradox is as inexplicable as it is unexpected.

And yet that He should have done so if He were in truth the very Word of God was, if we may say it, neither unnatural nor inappropriate. There were deep principles of Nature and of life so far in advance of the thought of the time, that not even the most devoted of those simple souls by the lake shore and mountain side could bear to receive them if plainly declared. Embodied in this epigrammatic and contradictory form they would be to the multitude simply strange jewels of whose value they would be ignorant; but the searcher after Truth, the thinker, alert of mind, keen of wit, would know them for pearls of great price.

I. Such a jewel we have here in the pronouncement of the text, that "to him that hath shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." A paradox—that is a saying startling in its form, and conveying a principle contrary to received opinion. And that this principle must have been one of deep importance and permanent value is evident from the fact that our Lord used the same words several times and on different occasions as a kind of pen-

dant to the parables of the Sower and the Talents, as if they were the key which, in the hands of a wise man, could be made to unlock the door of Parable and admit him into the very treasure-house of Truth.

And if we enquire what was this principle so difficult for the time that it could not be plainly stated, and yet so important for a right spiritual upbringing that it could not be suppressed even at the risk of a misunderstanding, we find that Nature herself, in her close relation to Him in Whom all things are summed up, whether things in Heaven or things on earth, illustrates and explains His teaching from her side, when she presents us in plain terms with the unmistakable process of Degeneration.

Now what do we mean by Degeneration? Simply this, that just as in all organic life there is a tendency for that life to fulfil itself in an upward direction along the path of progressive evolution, so that life, if the right conditions of its growth are disregarded, has an inevitable tendency to run to seed, as it were, in a downward direction, to revert to the original low type from which it sprang, or lose some of its functions by the atrophy of disuse, and that tendency is called Degeneration. ¹ Nature has her revenge upon neglect as well as upon ex-

¹ Natural Law in the Spiritual World, p. 110.

travagance. Misuse, with her, is as mortal a sin as abuse. To take a concrete example—there are certain animals—the mole, for instance—which have taken to spending their lives beneath the surface of the ground. And Nature has taken her revenge upon them in a thoroughly practical way—she has closed up their eyes. If they mean to live in darkness—so she argues—eyes are obviously a superfluous function. By neglecting them, these animals made it clear that they do not want them. And as one of Nature's fixed principles is that nothing shall exist in vain, the eyes are presently taken away, or reduced to a rudimentary state. There are fishes also which have had to pay the same forfeit for having made their abode in dark caverns where eyes could never be required.

And this same principle obtains in human life, and is easily recognizable as governing and determining the careers of men and women. To be successful, whether in business, politics, literature, or art, you need something more than good natural abilities, an adequate education, and a fair start in your walk in life. You need also the ambition which ever presses on to a definite goal, the quickness to seize opportunity, or the courage to create it—the diligence which makes you acquainted with principles and gives you the mastery of detail—the patience which slowly recognizes the relation which

one fact bears to another, the openness of mind which is ever ready to learn new methods, and the watchfulness which always seeks to improve the working of the old. Riches to the rich, power to the ambitious, position to the good workman, recognition to the persevering. "To him that hath shall be given," that is a rule of life as it is of Nature.

And the same principle works in a contrary direction with equal certainty and with dread facility. If you do not seek to develop yourself, and work out your own career; if you neglect gifts and opportunities alike; if you are content to depend on others and live the life of a parasite; if you allow the sleeping sickness of sloth to numb the faculties and paralyze endeavour, failure—if not the failure of ruin, at least of personal insignificance—is quite certain. On the grave of many a career which began with bright prospects and big possibilities, which somehow remained unfulfilled, this would be a fitting epitaph: "And whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

II. Now if we find this principle of neglect leading to Degeneration fully declared in Nature, and in all man's life amongst his fellows, in like manner, because of the undoubted uniformity in the laws which govern all created beings, we should expect to find evidences of its active working in

spiritual life also. If we ask, "Are men and women, as religious beings, subject to this same sad process of Degeneration?" then, if we have used our powers of observation to any purpose, we are compelled to answer that they are.

For all who believe that Religion is the only power that can lead a nation to find its full strength, it is the most regretted sign of the times that whether or no the Church has lost her hold on the masses, it is an undoubted fact that she is at present out of touch with the thought and feeling of the educated manhood of the time. In so far as this unhappy state of things may be due to causes which lie in the fault of the Church herself, I do not propose to say anything, save that the main cause will probably be found in the neglect to teach the Faith as a coherent and proportionate whole—the "all things whatsoever He hath commanded." But in so far as it may be due to some fault, or at least some lack of perception, in those who, like ourselves, were in youth brought up in the Christian faith, and now in maturity have ceased from any active profession of it, something, I think, may be said which perhaps needs saying.

And to begin with, there is one phenomenon on the religious side in the life of to-day, which is certainly striking, and to some of you may appear as significant as it does to me. In other ages men

who have been untouched by the inward power of Religion, nevertheless have been keenly interested in the problems of its external life. But if you try to gauge the extent and direction of religious feeling in the minds of educated men to-day—business men, practical men of all kinds who in other ways are making history—you will find that, generally speaking, there isn't any. These men, in point of fact, regard religion as something outside themselves, are quite polite about it, but have no interest in it; the religious faculty seems to be quite numbed—they have ceased to care about the matter.

Now unless our Lord was entirely wrong when He formulated the principle conveyed in the text; unless Nature lies, and our experience of human careers is entirely fallacious, these can only be signs of one thing—atrophy of the spiritual senses through neglect; decay, from misuse, of the powers of organic life received by union with Christ in Baptism—in a word, these are signs of Degeneration. If you ask such a man why he never enters a Church, why the splendid pæan of praise which week by week goes up to the God of Heaven and Earth lacks the essential part of its harmony which only His Voice can give, he will tell you perhaps that it is because the parson is a duffer, or his sermons are dull and long-winded, or because the singing is so bad, or because he wants to play golf, or

go up the river. But you know, and he knows too, that all these things are beside the mark—that if he *cared* at all, or had any interest in his spiritual life, none of them could altogether put to flight the “*gladness*” with which he would go into the House of the Lord ; that the real reason is the loss of the sense of worship and desire for communion.

And this loss is due in great part, I believe, to the fact that men have learned, or think they have learned, to regard Religion as a kind of chaos of spasmodic emotions without point, direction, or sequence, useful perhaps in its appeal to the imagination of a child, but having no relation with anything which makes up the serious life of a man ; while they have not realized that every man in Christ is a “new creature,” standing in his spiritual life at the threshold of a new career, a career of absorbing interest, holding possibilities of a great success, demanding all those qualities which likewise bring an earthly success—ambition, quickness, courage, diligence, patience, watchfulness, and an open mind.

And so it would almost seem as if our Lord had anticipated this state of things, when, after giving a thinly veiled record of His own teaching experiences in the parable of the Sower, He said in the language of an emphatic warning, “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” If He, Who in

conformity to the Father's will came to bring light into dark places had a duty of teaching, a duty later accepted by St. Paul with an intense enthusiasm which made him say, "Woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel," there was also a duty of hearing, and a responsibility of hearing in a right temper and a becoming spirit. The Faith of Christ claims to be heard on its own merits, to be allowed to make its own appeal to the minds and hearts of its hearers. The Gospel, as it came from the lips of Jesus Christ, treats men and women as reasonable beings, and does not depend for its answer on obedience to ecclesiastical authority, whose tyranny, as it was wielded by leaders of the Jewish Church, He expressly rejected. And that He should have issued His solemn warning of loss with regard to a right use of the spiritual faculty of hearing is just what we should have expected when we remember that "Faith comes by hearing," and that Faith is, as it were, the circulation of the spiritual life, without which all the other spiritual powers of sight, sense, and touch must remain inert and torpid.

So, if a man should come to us and say, "If hearing be so important, tell me what I am to listen for," one can but answer, "Listen for the voice of God," that voice which is never silent in all His great universe wherever there are ears to hear; that

voice so modulated that none need be without witness of Himself, which first of all is heard within the doctrine and worship of the Catholic Church.

III. (a) Yes. For little as the modern man may realize it, the Church is something more than a lumber-room for worn-out, old-fashioned theological furniture. If that clear voice which is hers by nature is still somewhat thickened and strained with the passion of bygone centuries, it yet proclaims in no uncertain tone the brotherhood of all men in the Fatherhood of God, which is ever more clearly recognized to be the Desire of all nations. To the world at large she shows what are the true ideals and eternal principles of life, while the individual man she teaches to know himself and the needs of his threefold nature, body, soul, and spirit, in the light of the Lord's provision for their Eternal welfare in Sacrament, Bible, and Prayer. And, lastly, in her splendid and stately ceremonies she sets forth the Eternal Majesty of God, and bids us gather up all the aspirations and powers of life, public and private, in a worship that shall be a fitting oblation to His honour, and a true elevation of all our being—"Take heed therefore how ye hear."

(b) And then the Voice of God is heard in Nature, where "all His works praise His Name." Not perhaps as men once thought they could hear it, deducing design and purpose from the finished work

before them, but rather in the grand uniformity of Law whose vast sweep embraces the visible universe and admits of no exceptions, reducing it like parallels of latitude to intelligent order. ¹“The sigh of the wind, the cry of bird and beast, the moan of the sea, all speak of laws drawn for us to understand the part by some Hand that drew the whole: so drawn, perhaps, that, understanding the part, we too in time may learn to understand the whole.” And so as we come to know both better, we hear how the Voice of God in the Church is confirmed and illustrated by the Voice of God in Nature, as the science of spiritual life finds in the science of natural life the counterpart of its own laws.

(c) And again the Voice of God comes to the keen and attentive ear along many tortuous channels of the sea of human life. History, that great mirror in which humanity beholds its true face, reveals the inner meaning of all the strivings and doings of the past, and shows how in them all the eternal principle of Justice, Righteousness, and Order, which the Bible proclaims to be the will of God, were ever being more firmly rooted and deeply settled in the social polity. We too are now living to make History, and in all the many conflicting sounds of social tendencies and movements we may hear the voice of Him Who orders all things according to

¹ Drummond.

His will—His assurance that they are working together for the good of His people.

(*d*) And, lastly, the Voice of God is in the voice of conscience, which yet speaks on when all the pageant of Life and Nature has passed by—the ground tone, the fundamental, as it were, of all the harmonies which make that Divine symphony. For as in the Church, in Nature, and in Life, we come to a knowledge of God's law only slowly, by degrees, and through many indirect avenues of approach, so in the voice of conscience the Law of God makes itself known by the sudden and direct appeal which is in our instinct of right and wrong, in our intuitive perception of all things that are "honest, lovely, and of good report."

What then shall we hear—where shall we listen? Hear the Voice of God, for one of His many sound-waves shall surely strike on your ear. There, where He has placed you, stand in position to drink in the sweetness of the glorious eternal melody, and then "Take heed how ye hear." Remember that the spiritual life, the life in God, is a career, not simply the playing a part in a series of emotional tableaux—a career which for success demands earnestness, interest, and ambition. Realize your spiritual powers, give yourself a chance, for to him that hath shall be given. But remember in these days of new learning and new tests no religion


can live on authority and tradition, or on anything else but personal conviction. If every Godward aspiration of the soul has been allowed to become extinct, and every inlet that was open to Heaven be choked, and every talent for religious love and trust have been persistently neglected and ignored, then the end must be spiritual Degeneration and decay, for "whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

Sermon V.

THE DESIRE OF THE ANGELS.

I ST. PETER I. 10 ff.

“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you : searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven ; which things the Angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.”

I.  NE cannot study the Epistles without becoming aware that the Christian Faith, considered simply as a new religion striving to propagate itself, possessed one superlative advantage ; it started on its course with the propelling power of an undeniable history behind it. The Gospel came into being not as other new religions, or so-called religions, have come,

from the self-warranted inspiration of a single individual, from the perverted opinions of a few eccentrics, concerning property or marriage, or some other common institution, from the specious charlatanism which makes its appeal to the vulgar appetite for mystery. It had no such spontaneous detached origin. The Gospel, like all great forces which vitally affect human life, was the result of growth. One great source of its original strength was just this ; that it had its roots in the ancient past of a race ere it blossomed into fulness in Jesus Christ, that the government, the literature, the ideals, the manners and customs, even the very infirmities and backslidings of a remarkable people formed the links in the chain of historic continuity which bound that past to the person of Him Who came to fulfil it.]

And so we find that this was an advantage which from the very first the Apostles recognized, and were not disposed to forego. In every argument or exhortation which they addressed to the Jews themselves, frequent reference is made to the literature or chronicles of their people to support the claims of the Gospel to be the true faith, and never without result. Again, in addressing those who were not Jews, although what we call the scientific use of history had not then dawned on the world, it is evident that the Apostles were very conscious of

the favourable impression produced by the appeal to historic continuity.

Accordingly St. Peter, writing to the Churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, mainly composed of Gentile converts, of the hope and joy which is in the common salvation, is careful to point out that the spirit which prompted the ancient prophets to write of that salvation, whether they knew it or no, was in fact "the Spirit of Christ," the very same Spirit through Whom, he says, in a later verse, "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth."

And I think it is very instructive to notice the view which St. Peter gives us here of the prophets, the manner of their inspiration, and the functions of prophecy; for it seems to differ very widely from that which until quite recently was in vogue amongst us, and is still perhaps most generally entertained by Christians. You know the conceptions of inspiration and prophecy generally with which most of us have grown up, a direct heritage of the days when orthodoxy held closely to the verbal inspiration of the Bible. It was hopelessly magical and unreal. Our mental vision of the prophets was one of men narcotized under the influence of some mysterious anæsthetic, in which state a Divine magician imprinted on their minds the exact outlines of some picture of the future, or made

them see visions of a terrible, extraordinary, or meaningless kind. We thought of them as puppets chained to a desk, forming written characters of whose meaning they were largely ignorant, while a Divine mechanic pulled the strings. The function of prophecy we conceived of as either that of startling the world into acquiescence by a display of what is called "second sight," or else that of manufacturing texts which could afterwards be learned by Christians, and used by them as proofs of their faith. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the rest of them were just instruments, human pens dipped into a magical inkpot without freedom, thought, or volition of their own. I do not think that this is a very exaggerated presentment of our early ideas, the ideas which, if we think about the matter at all, I believe most of us still more or less cling to.

Now St. Peter gives us something very different from all this. In his view the prophets were first of all enquirers, men who searched diligently for the meanings of things in life around. They were men who lived intensely in the present rather than in the future; but who, having a firm belief in the eternal righteousness of God, and in the providential order of event, sought to impress their belief on the mingled conditions of their time. Any conclusions to which they came, which, as St. Peter says, were revealed to them, they arrived at as the result

of their own search. If from their close study of God's work amongst men in the present they were led on to forecast the future tendencies of Divine providence, it was in a natural order, and not in consequence of some miraculous infusion of knowledge. The prophets, indeed, were mostly patriots—politicians, men keenly alive to the play of human forces, distinguished by their lofty view of national destiny and the elements of natural greatness: men living in the open, not pious ignoramusses or musty hermits. Above all, as St. Peter tells us, they possessed that complete mental liberty which, while convinced as they were of the real inspiration of their view of events, yet urged them on to develop their powers, search out the conclusions of things, see "what the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify," or at "what time" they might hope for the confirmation of their counsels.

And it is very interesting to find that in his suggestion as to the method of prophecy, the Christian Apostle does but re-echo the thought of the greatest of the old prophets. Isaiah opens his account of his great politico-religious mission in Judah with this significant statement: "The word that Isaiah, the son of Amos, *saw* concerning Judah and Jerusalem." "The expression," says Professor Adam Smith, in his commentary on the prophet, "is vague, often abused, and in need of defining. Vision is

not employed here to express any magical display before the eyes of a prophet of the very words which he was to speak to the people, or any communication to his thoughts by dream or ecstasy. They are higher qualities of vision which these chapters unfold. There is, first of all, the power of forming an ideal, of seeing and describing a thing in the fulfilment of all the promise that is in it. But these prophecies are much more remarkable for two other powers of inward vision, to which we give the names of insight and intuition—insight into human character; intuition into Divine principles—a clear knowledge of what God is, and how man will act, a keen discrimination of the present state of affairs, and an unreasoned conviction of moral truth and the Divine will.”

When, then, Isaiah tells us that the peculiar characteristic of prophecy is *penetrativeness*, and St. Peter assures us that the prophets were enquirers diligently searching for enlightenment, they are practically presenting us with complementary halves of the same truth. The truth that the knowledge of God’s ways in things temporal and spiritual is only vouchsafed to those who bring to the business personal effort based on a lively interest. It is a truth which is placed in the very foreground of the Gospel, when our Divine Lord, as a child, being found in the Temple learning and asking questions,

declares, if one may say so, in the most natural way in the world, that He is only "about His Father's business."

II. Now all this that St. Peter tells us concerning the prophets and their methods is extremely illuminative and interesting. But he does not leave the matter there. It is not enough for him to let us see that the prophets, in the course of their searching out of God's ways, arrived at the conviction that the end of things which they saw was not yet. He goes much farther than that. He takes a flight into the realms of spiritual action which is only comparable to the soaring imagination of St. Paul, when he tells us that this very quality of penetrativeness which distinguished the prophets belongs also to the Holy Angels. "Unto whom," he says, speaking of the prophets, "it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven; which things," he adds, "the Angels desire to look into." The statement is unexampled in its originality, and bears about it evident marks of truth. St. Peter is himself among the illumined. He has just given convincing proof that he understands the conditions which govern man's intercourse with God, and knows what is the real meaning of inspiration. He is eminently quali-

fied to discover new facts in the spiritual order, and, through what channels of inductive reasoning we can hardly say, he lights on one, "which things the Angels desire to look into."

We should be presumptuous indeed if we had the hardihood to say that this was only guess-work. It cannot be the mere enunciation of a traditional idea, for there is nothing in the older view of the Angel's place and office to suggest that they were other than messengers of the Most High, bound by close conditions of strenuous service. The Apostle's confident pronouncement on a salient point in the Angelic character can hardly be anything less than an actual discovery. For to St. Peter the Angels are not the creation of a luxuriant religious fancy, or the lingering reminder of an ancient myth, nor does he make use of the redundant imagery of the Apocalypse in the description of their persons. For him the Angels are intelligent Beings, constantly active, indeed, in the service of God, but intensely interested in the affairs of men. Just as the prophets longed to *see* into all the play of motive and incident in that remarkable history which formed the prologue of the Incarnation drama; so the Angels, though so far as we can gather, they were debarred by their nature from any immediate participation in it, are keen to *see* into the working out of that marvellous development of what St. Peter calls sal-

vation, in which the power of the Incarnation Truth is gradually permeating the whole life of the world.

There are many people to whom the existence and work of the Angels is just a pretty fancy. In that case it is one of the oldest fancies in the world, and is common to most Oriental Religions. But to my mind, if one attempts to go a step beyond that very easy and common way of dealing with a difficulty by simply ignoring it, or declaring that it has no existence, the whole question opens up a way to the exercise of that spiritual imagination which is indeed one of the noblest faculties we possess. By imagination, I mean simply the power to project the mind from the known to the unknown, the power to construct the mental atmosphere which best shows up a fact or group of facts. Imagination enters into everything. Into business when a merchant starts a new venture, or speculates in "futures"; into politics when statesmen construct alliances and make dispositions of forces; into science when Owen reconstructed a pre-historic animal from a single bone; or when the mathematician finds the curve of the parabola. Art without it dies, and Religion surely languishes. And so for those of us who may not be too sceptical of aught that cannot be demonstrated in a particular way, or too proud of their own practical natures to exercise their spiritual imaginations, it is an inspiring

thought that the Angels, in their keen intelligence, bring an added testimony to the greatness of our inheritance in Jesus Christ, when they desire to "look into" the conditions of our salvation.

III. "Which things the Angels desire to look into."

It seems quite clear that St. Peter thought that what we may perhaps call his discovery in spiritual science would have a stimulating effect on further research; for immediately after his statement as to the Angels' interest in man's relation to the sufferings and glory of Christ, he adds this emphatic advice: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind." The meaning of his advice I take to be this: that just as the Prophets on the earth and the Angels beyond the earth exhibit so markedly this quality of *penetrativeness* with regard to God's ways with and intentions for man, so that same quality ought to distinguish every earnest Christian man and woman.

It is the common belief that a man gives all that can be expected of him intellectually when he vouchsafes a general religious acquiescence. It is a bad belief, because vagueness in matters of real importance is good for no one and is responsible for a deal of misunderstanding and empty prejudice. It is a common fallacy that the details of religious faith can be safely left to the expert, because they

have no such influence on life and character as have the simple rules of morality and benevolence. It is just this fallacy which St. Peter cuts at the root of, when, after quoting the example of the Prophets and Angels, he tells us to "gird up the loins of the *mind*." No influence on life and character!—why nothing has so much. What moulds and shapes the character of an artist but the constant application of his mind to the technique of his art, the loving appreciation of its niceties, the mastery of its details? If the Christian has any advantage over the adherent to any other form of Religion, it is just this: that to him, by virtue of his union with Jesus Christ, the Great Example, belongs the power to attain to the supreme art of living; for all living is an art in any civilized community.

It may not be clear to you at first sight how a knowledge of the principle which lies behind the meaning of the Sacraments, or how an understanding of the relations in which the various articles of the Creed stand to each other, at the exact place of Confirmation in the economy of spiritual order can help you to attain to this art, or in other words make you a better Christian, any more than it might be immediately evident to you that a knowledge of anatomy or of line drawing is an essential of the painter's art, or of counterpoint and musical history to the musician's. But once enter yourself as a stu-

dent, once "gird up the loins of your mind," and you will see the connexions of things. So I firmly believe it is with Religion. Study the details of the Word of God in the light of to-day, and interest will awake. And interest will bring a greater devotion to your Lord and Master, a greater reverence for the supreme qualities of His Person, so that gradually you may find yourself becoming a better Christian; more earnest, more faithful, more obedient, more charitable, more refined. The Church knows this; that is why she puts the rudiments of Christian instruction into the hands of every child of hers in the form of the Catechism, that is why she will never willingly forego the privilege of teaching it in the public schools.

Yes, we need in these days to "gird up the loins of our minds," to get down to the root of things. Jesus Christ, when He entered human life, entered it never to leave it. His promise was that He would never leave us, and He never has. You cannot escape Him, whatever your view of Him may be, for He is all round you. There is nothing you can touch of all the activities of human life into which He does not enter. That is the real meaning of the Incarnation. His is a very elementary understanding of his Lord who sees Him only in Religion. Into the business of the world, the art of the world, the politics of the world, even the war of the world

—into all Jesus Christ entered when He, the Son of God, became Man, and you cannot drive Him away. At this moment two great nations, our own and our immediate neighbour, are experiencing in common a great difficulty in dealing adequately with the problem of national education ; and in each case Jesus Christ, your view of Him, your understanding of His teaching and its requirements, of the meaning of His Incarnation, is the principal factor in that problem.


We deplore the differences which distil an unwelcome acrimony into political and religious life. We long for a unity which seems as far away as ever, but we often seem to forget that if in our common religion there is so much to differ about, and the differences are largely the result of ignorance, there must also be much to agree on. That agreement, if it is ever to come, and it would bring many blessings with it, can only come by girding up the "loins of the mind" in a single-hearted endeavour to "look into" the details of those things which the Angels also desire to look into.

Sermon VI.

THE CORPORATE IDEA.

ST. MATT. XXII. 5.

“ But they made light of it, and went their ways.”

HE Parable which we call “ The Marriage of the King’s Son ” is unquestionably one of those, the primary meaning of which is to be sought in contemporary circumstances and discovered in local conditions. It was a bold and comprehensive challenge of the Jewish position. It was a warning to a people who had occupied a foremost place on the world’s stage, whose history clearly marked them out for high destiny ; a people oft summoned to greatness, but always in the event disappointing the best expectation of them ; a warning that their day had passed away from them, their last opportunity come. The last summons had sounded in their ears, the last test was offered. Would they see in Him Who spoke the incarnation of that lofty ideal of which their past was eloquent,

the very genius of their race, the visible reminder of that which no Jew who understood himself and his people could ever forget, that in God alone was their rock and their might, their fortress and their deliverer, or would they make light of it and go their devious ways?

The issue was never in doubt for a moment. History repeated itself, as it is always repeating itself on different planes of action. Just as of old their kings and rulers, disregarding the impassioned summons of the patriot prophets had over and over again preferred the easy way of a political alliance—Egypt or some other—to the more difficult task of building up internal strength through national purification; so now the rulers and chieftains, religious and lay, went their own ways of political jugglery and subterranean intrigue (the story lives in the pages of their great historian), and made light of the voice of God, which warned them that a nation, even as a man, makes its own character and its own career. Even now events were shaping themselves for the great catastrophe, when the national unity which had withstood shock after shock should finally be dissolved; and the parable hints, not obscurely, of that time and of the ordained instrument, the great armies which, though bearing the Roman eagle and wielding the terrible Roman sword, were yet the armies of the King.

It was a solemn and impressive unveiling of that mysterious secret of Destiny, in which the affairs of men, in appearance so self-caused so self-contained, are linked to the mighty counsels of God. "God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto their fathers by the prophets," had in those days spake a yet more tremendous word unto them by the mouth of His Son, and after that He spoke no more. Indeed—it is an odd thought—can we be sure that since then He has ever spoken to that strange people who move among the peoples of the world but are not of them ; who adopt the customs of the Christian world, but at heart cling to a civilization of their own ; that people who, while all else is changing, never change, who exhibit to-day the same strange union of inspired genius with base materialism as once vexed the soul of their prophets ; that people who, in an unprogressive faith under old-world forms half magical wholly primeval, worship Him Whom once they knew as the God, not of the dead, but of the living.

And if this be the first meaning of the Parable, the second and perhaps subsidiary meaning is quite clear also. For this Parable was uttered to serve a great national end—an end one in itself, while two-fold in the field of its operation ; and so if its first application be a political one, its second is of course spiritual. For these two strands of life,

though to a superficial view they are woven apart, out of different materials, by different hands, yet ever unite to form one thread of Fate.

I. "The Kingdom of Heaven" it is, then, which "is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding." In this Parable we seem to have but the complement of those other Parables of the Kingdom, such as the Mustard seed and the Tares, which are related in St. Matthew xiii. Just as in those you have partial ideas suggestive of some aspects of the Church's growth, so in this you seem to have a comprehensive picture of the whole Church and its mission in the world, which in its careful arrangement of details yet brings out the whole design. You have also an indication of the natural human tendencies which may be expected to be in perennial opposition to that mission, together with a suggestion as to the means of overcoming them.

What then is the truth which on its spiritual side this Parable is designed to proclaim? In the picture of the Marriage Supper, disregarding for our present purpose any more mystical interpretation, you get, as it seems to me, a very clear pronouncement of the great central truth which the whole Church simply exists to witness to. The truth that for the highest purposes of humanity, and to subserve the

ends of true progress, the corporate life is a far more worthy, as well as a more appropriate medium, than the self-centred ; that organization is the true masterword of human improvement, while individualism is only the likely guess of the half-taught.

In the idea itself there was of course nothing new. As the life-history of man testifies in the well-known evolution from family to tribe, from tribe to nation, there has always been a well-marked tendency in the human race for individuals of common origin to unite for purposes of mutual protection and defence, while the ancient as well as the modern world afforded instances of the temporary combination of individuals unrelated by any blood-tie for the attainment of some interest mutually agreed on.

But the originality of the Gospel message lies in this ; that our Lord Jesus Christ was the first to expose the spiritual principle which underlies the corporate life, the first to point the way to the higher uses of human organization ; for the Divine Son was the first to discover in the Fatherhood of God the radical cure for human selfishness. For the real meaning of what we call the Gospel is surely this : that just as the Son of God, becoming Incarnate in Jesus Christ, "summed up"—as St. Paul puts it—in Himself all things, "whether things in the

Heavens, or things in the earth, or things under the earth," so He, in His supreme wisdom, has founded the Church on the basis of His own recreated humanity, in which, adapted as it is to the constitution of human nature, and following as it does the lines of human tendency, all nations of the earth are organized into one great family—one in Jesus Christ and one with the Father.

And so the Church, proclaiming in its Creed the unity of the Son with the Father, and of all His members with the Son, with its family life in Baptism, with its corporate worship, its corporate prayer, its corporate Communion, exists to supply the ideal of human organization, to uphold that ideal both in its teaching and its practice; and in the end, if as a human institution it does its duty to fulfil that ideal, as men and women learn to discover in the spiritual life she offers them, that their natural inclination to selfishness is contrary to their real interests.

As a matter of exposition it is very interesting to see how this great idea underlies the imagery and shines through the details of the Parable. A King plans a Festival on a great scale, which he intends as a kind of apotheosis of national life. The invitations are of course sent by the King himself, because only a king is so far above all that all will be mutually honoured by sharing his hospitality;

and also because, in the courteous convention of civilized life, the King's invitation is treated as a command. The occasion is the marriage of the King's son—here it would almost seem as if our Lord gave His imprimatur to St. John's symbolism of the Church as the Bride of Christ, with Whom He has entered into indissoluble union—and it is clearly the King's intention to make the Festival the representative of all the elements of national life. He sends out his invitations far and wide; no class, no occupation is to be overlooked; and then in accordance with the Eastern custom, as travellers attest, he sends the second or verbal summons which is expected on these occasions.

Now you see, of course, how our central idea is expressed in the figure of a Feast. All sorts and conditions of men are called to sit together at the same time at the Royal board. Outside, in ordinary daily life, they have nothing in common—very possibly they will have not the most distant acquaintance with each other's mode of life. If they meet at all as individuals, they do so as sundered by class distinctions and jarring interests, in an atmosphere more or less of prejudice, misunderstanding, and suspicion. As a rule they would not seek out each other's company, they would have little to say to one another, for their lives hold no common denominator. But once within the King's presence

and all this is changed ; for the King of one is the King of all, in whom each recognizes the Father as well as the Ruler of His people. Under his presidency, they sit down together in peace and enjoyment, mindful of the dictates of mutual courtesy and toleration. Antagonisms, which outside are fiercely insistent, are here subdued and put aside out of respect for the King ; and each seeing his neighbour in the most favourable light, begins to understand and appreciate something of the good that is in him. It is an obvious picture of the Catholic Church, which in its essential organization is designed to make possible, and maintain, and perpetuate, a state of things which in the Parable is depicted as existing only temporarily.

Well, this is a picture of what might have been, this is the King's benevolent intention in issuing his summons. But alas ! for the reality. The invited, or at least many of them, "made light of it, and went their ways—one to his farm, and another to his merchandise." They preferred, that is, their own way, their own narrow ends, their individual selfishness, to co-operating with their King in his noble plan for the development of the nation. Perhaps they did not try to understand the Royal idea ; perhaps an acceptance of the invitation involved some trouble ; it would be a long way to go up to the Festival ; there might be some discomfort, some

fatigue; they did not feel inclined to put themselves about. And so they not only decided to stay at home, but treated the King's messengers with needless contumely.

II. And here we may leave the further details of the Parable to note the profound foresight, the intimate knowledge of human nature which is exhibited in the categorical description of those who refuse. The man with his farm, the man with his merchandise. You see who these stand for. The former is the man who *has*. He has attained to, or perhaps has inherited, all he wants—money, friends, position; and he has settled down to enjoy the solid comforts of an easy, settled prosperity. The latter is the man who is getting, whose ambition is in the making, who has marked his place, and who is climbing, with what speed he may, the ladder of success which leads to it. And to these we may perhaps add, without detracting from the unity of this Parable—nay, even completing it—the man from the very similar parable in St. Luke, who had married a wife, and so *he* too could not come.

To these, as to all others, Religion makes its appeal, an appeal to understand the ideal and enter into the meaning of the Church's corporate life; an appeal to acknowledge that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof"; an appeal to them to make trial of the Fatherhood of God in Jesus

Christ ; an appeal for unity ; an appeal to put aside selfishness and individualism in the presence and for the sake of the King. "But they make light of it, and go their ways."

The world to-day presents an extraordinary mixture of surface generosity, with deep-seated selfishness. A certain consideration for the material wants of other people is expected nowadays of those who have got on, or are getting on, and they give their money freely, sometimes too freely. After all, there is a great deal of money to give in a social system where colossal fortunes at one end are reared on a basis of monotonous drudgery at the other, with a vast area of ill-paid, ill-fed, ill-equipped, struggling, semi-gentility in between. People of certain means are expected nowadays to take a practical interest in hospitals and similar institutions ; the democracy must be kept in a good humour, and after all the praise of men is not unwelcome, especially if it be accompanied by a growing disinclination to cultivate the fear of God.

Yes, the rich give their money, often perhaps because they have to. For the rest, they "go their ways," and the ways of the rich are exclusive. But the number of people who will give, what is more troublesome to give—time, sympathy, and understanding to the problems of life as others have to face them—does not increase in anything like the

same proportion. It is possible indeed that what people give with one hand they take away with the other. It is questionable whether the existence of a large and growing wealthy class does not make for selfishness, as it were, mechanically and of its very presence. The habits of the rich are naturally formed entirely with regard to their own pleasure, but if exclusive they are catching, and easily imitable after a fashion. As the opportunities of making money grow, and the numbers of persons engaged in making it grow also, so the standard of comfort, of pleasure, of amusement, and consequently of expenditure is always mounting. The savour of wealth is pleasant, even when sniffed in from afar, and the habit of ostentation affects class after class to their ill-doing; for what is considered but comfort at one end and unrealizable splendour at the other is extravagance in the middle, the necessity of the one becomes the ill-afforded luxury of the other.

"They went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." We think that we have found a better way of living than any Religion can teach us. We acquiesce in an example of boundless prodigality, selfishly set up by those who are openly contemptuous of the restrictions of the slender purse, we couple with it the fashion of an easy philanthropy and label it Christianity. But it is

a very poor substitute for that splendid ideal which the organization of the Catholic Church exists to uphold—the essential unity of all classes of men in the Fatherhood of God, Who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should have everlasting life.

And if this ideal is fading, which a few centuries ago was more nearly realized than it is to-day, for all our new-found philanthropy ; and if people make light of the claim that Religion makes on their lives, and go their ways, it is through the operation of the same causes. I hope that I may not be considered to have unduly narrowed the issue, if I speak for a moment of the light disregard of religious practice, of invitations to worship and prayer. The same causes, I say, operate here. The people who *have*, the rich people with their rich habits, want their Sundays for the other rich Saturday to Monday people, their friends and guests ; and if a few of them go to Church, it is often, one must fear, as a good-natured concession to a recognized convention. For the most part they keep to their farm, which is now the country house. The man who is making, getting, wants Sunday for himself. He thinks that he is worn out when the Lord's Day comes, sometimes he really is, and he must have ease and relaxation, and so he keeps to his merchandise. Nor is it the rich alone who "make light

of it and go their ways." The poor do the same. The man who has married a wife, or the woman who has married a husband, *they* cannot come. They urge family claims, such reasonable claims; in the morning the meal to prepare; or the father never sees his children at other times; in the evening friends or relations from a distance; while all the time, from lack of example, of training, of any effort to see to it, their children are growing up in ignorance of the very rudiments of the Christian faith.

III. Does it matter, all this? In the weary war of denominations, in the empty strife of sects, attention flags, and we are accustomed to act, and possibly to think, as though it does not. But are we so sure that our modern notions of these things are the right ones? We profess to decry sectional selfishness, and we are all for breaking down barriers and finding a common basis of interest. But, as the Parable points out, the diversities and antagonisms of life are only composed in the presence of a common King and Father, the recognition of Whom the corporate worship and Sacraments of the Church are designed to keep alive.

It would seem indeed that the events of the world's history are preparing the way for a new acceptance, a new recognition of Christ's teaching as to the necessity for the corporate life. The older

political economy which regarded man as simply a soulless money-making machine, and life as a bundle of mutually exclusive selfishnesses, is already discarded. Unfettered human liberty we now see to be not the best thing for society. Freedom of contract for one class may mean something like slavery for another. The right to manage one's own affairs in one's own way is not uncommonly detrimental to higher interests than those of the individual. The old utilitarian conception of society with its gospel of individualism is on the wane, a new conception is bringing with it the new gospel of collectivism. Discipline of some kind we must have if the unwieldy mass of modern populations is to keep its equilibrium. Shall it be the discipline of man, which is founded on force, or the discipline of God, which is founded on love?

There it is, the eternal choice, never of greater importance for the world's work, the world's good, than to-day. Remember, whatever else we make light of, selfishness, that is godlessness, brings its own scourge, and we cannot make light of that. "The king sends forth his armies" now, just as the Roman legions once overran Judea and sacked the Holy City. The principle applies to war of all kinds, and if the circumstances of the time are less favourable to military collisions, in which, after all, there is something impersonal to the average citizen,

they foster and encourage the more personal, industrial, and social strifes. The minor antagonisms of life are daily becoming more pronounced, more acute; there is danger that they may ripen into unreasoning hatreds, and there is no power now active amongst us which is strong enough to compose them. As riches increase, men of every class more and more set their hearts upon them; selfishness grows and spreads, and the hand of God, which alone can calm with soothing touch the fevers of overheated, over-excited humanity, is impatiently thrust away.


Our Incarnate King and Lord ever issues through His Church His summons to sit down at the perpetual feast of humanity, of which the Communion of His Body and Blood is the exquisite symbol. For the most part we make light of it and go our ways; but we may yet learn, to our cost, that the summons of Religion is more practical, more enlightened, than the dictates of selfishness.

Sermon VII.

TO-DAY.

ROMANS x. 6, 7, 8.

“ Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into Heaven (that is to bring Christ down from above) ; or who shall descend into the deep (that is to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it ? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.”

OU are standing at the edge of a tall cliff that overhangs the sea. It is night, but not one of those nights full of menace, when the soul is all on edge with apprehension, when tremendous half-formed words hovering in the void seem about to shake it with a great resounding utterance. Here is nothing fearful, nothing monstrous, only a deep, quiet strangeness. It is dark, but not deadly dark ; a pale glow of light comes and goes behind the dark, which show you Nature breathing as she sleeps. There is a great stillness, but it is not a chilly, dangerous stillness. The air, soft and warm, seems to wrap you round

with a sense of comfort, of protection ; it is alive with little gentle movements that have neither beginning nor end, little coaxing breaths that seem to be asking for your sympathy and attention. It is a night to draw the soul out of you.

You gaze upwards. Above you stretches in wide display the placid glory of the Heavens, its illimitable depths showing darkly, deeply blue. Over your head stands out boldly the familiar sign of a constellation ; above and beyond gleam stars innumerable, of magnitude greater and less, receding and diminishing until all sense of separateness is lost in the incalculable swarm of the Milky Way. Here is order, definite, unchangeable, an order on so vast a scale that to the uncomprehending gaze it appears as confusion. Here too one knows, for all this solid calm, is movement ; movement established in law, controlled in the order of a mighty design : but movement so tremendous, so appallingly rapid in its details, that the imagination is stunned in thinking of it, so appallingly slow in its effect that the eye cannot discern even its mightiest undulation. As you gaze and gaze your soul seems to leap into an activity of longing. So much I know, so much I am told, so much I can guess ; but my knowledge, the whole world's knowledge of those Heavens which have been man's constant outlook since man was, what does it all amount

to? A corner surveyed, an acre or two mapped out, no more. The longing to know is upon you; could you but scale the Heavens you would not ask but to leave earth behind. But there can be no answer for you, save the slow-spelled answers of time, and as your gaze sinks down abashed before so great a spectacle, you feel yourself gripped by the mystery of it almost to unconsciousness.

You gaze downwards. Far below your feet, out of the velvet gloom, rises to view the heaving floor of the sea. Here too is order, which yet too often shakes the shrinking soul of man in voices of terrific uproar and death-dealing confusion. Here too is movement, movement which can be measured, calculated. Movement which tells of the age-long moulding of the earth's shape, of the formation of continents and islands, of the upheaval of mountain ranges. Movement which speaks of the beneficent wonders of climate, which, typifying as it does the changeful life of man, is itself marvellously interwoven with all his history. Here too is a mystery, less remote, but none the less profound—the haunting question of the sea.

But if night brings awe and confusion of mind, it brings also reflection. Poised up there between sky and sea, you seem to yourself so shrunk in importance, so inconceivably small; but yet your feet are planted on earth. The Heavens hold the

mystery of the world's future, the sea of its past ; but the solid earth reminds you of the present, the day which is yours, the present, which is greater than the past, more sure than the future. The mystery of the Heavens and the sea is great, but the mystery of man to himself is even greater ; man, who is not only acted upon by these vast, silent, orderly forces of nature, but acts upon them. As you stand there questioning yourself, responsive to the silent eloquence of the night, it is borne in on you, that as a self-conscious, self-reflecting, loving, planning being, *you* are after all the central wonder of all this great mystery which surrounds you. For you have your tasks, and you have your God.¹ "Men go abroad to gaze upon the mountains and the waves, the broad rivers, the wide ocean, the courses of the stars, and pass themselves, the crowning wonder, by."

II. And some such thoughts as these perhaps may have filled the Apostles' minds in view of the great and overwhelming mystery of the Ascension. It was night with them. Not deadly dark with the darkness of finality, yet dark enough to bring confusion, doubt, uncertainty into their minds ; for their Lord, their Leader, their Light, was taken from them. The future was very uncertain, rather terrible perhaps ; the past they knew they could not rightly

¹ S. Augustine—Confessions.

read as yet, but maybe they were not altogether sure that it had not already belied its promise. Of one thing alone they were sure. Their Master, Who had been with them, and yet not with them, Whom of late they had hardly dared to recognize, so wonderful was He in His strange new appearance, was now quite definitely gone.

Whither had He gone? Where should they seek Him? for find Him they must if their lives were not to lose all hope, all meaning for themselves. Who should lead the quest? Should it be Peter, with his eager daring, his obstinate impetuosity? Should it be John, with his faithful love, his deep knowledge of the Master's mind? Or was it one of the Lord's brethren who most had the right? All was strange, new, and confusing; all the old conditions of life were in abeyance—and so nothing, perhaps, would have seemed impossible to them then. Was one of them to ascend into Heaven and bring Christ down from above; or should one of them, like Saul of old, dare the terrors of the underworld, and bring up Christ again from among the dead, if haply He were yet preaching to the spirits in prison?

And then, as they began to recover from the first shock of the crowning mystery of their intercourse with Him, they remembered what He had told them to do. They were not to stand gazing up into

Heaven, as though by the very strength of their longing they could follow Him once and for all ; they were not to stand musing and meditating in vain regret for an empty tomb. The future could not be hurried it must unfold in a due order, the past belonged to itself, but the present was theirs.

And so they knew what they must do, they must simply wait, for that was His command ; but not without hope, not without a very definite encouragement. For now they remembered that they had received a promise—"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." And although it was not for them to know, or seek to know, the times and the seasons which the Father had put in His own power, yet they could wait on, sure that in due time that promise would be fulfilled. Then all this state of confusion and bewilderment would come to an end. When they once had "power," then they would know better what to expect in the future, would know how much of the past they ought to cling to ; above all, would know with what sort of mind they ought to meet the problems of the present. Nay, more, when the promise was fulfilled, their very relation to the Lord Himself would be changed. Of old the power of His Life, His Truth, His Way, was not really theirs at all, but His. They were in close contact with it,

they respected it, admired it, wondered at it, loved it ; but it had not really entered into their lives, it was external to them. When He was not actually with them they could do nothing. They could not cast out devils, they could not feed the multitude, they could not even pray. There were aspects of truth, besides, which they debated among themselves, but could not understand, or even accept, unless He were with them. But when once they should have received His Spirit, then the power of His life, His mind, should pass into them and become *their* power, inspiring them with creative ability. Then they would be able to seize on truth with a new apprehension ; the Word would be nigh them, in their mouth, and in their heart, it would become part of them. They would even be able to gather fresh truth out of the conditions of their life and service, and work it up into new forms, extending it in wider directions as need arose and opportunity offered, so that by-and-bye they would actually find themselves working out their Master's forecast, that they should do "greater works" even than those they had seen Him do.

And so as the night of their first bewilderment broke, they knew that if the mystery of the Ascension and all that led up to it was great, they need not be overwhelmed or weakened by it. For their own lives held the possibility of a mystery even

greater—the mystery of man, sinful, short-sighted, and forgetful, filled with the Spirit of God.

III. And it is just these conditions which the Apostles experienced in the first moment after the Ascension which seem to be very nearly reproduced in our own day. With many of us, I fear, with too many of us, I am sure, it is night—a dark time of confusion, doubt, and uncertainty. The Lord has left us as we knew Him of old, and there are some who are not at all sure that He has not left us altogether; others who are very uncertain how and when they may expect to find Him again. Religion, it is true, has composed, or is composing, her recent differences with science, but the large majority, who are neither men of science nor theologians, who are just simple citizens with an inherited sense of respect for religion though without any acquaintance with the best religious thought, still think of science and religion as locked in a death struggle with the old order underneath.

But other questions too have arisen; questions of criticism, of the historic sense of the Scriptures, of the meaning and scope of inspiration—questions which cannot be burked or ignored, the issue of which seem to many to have taken away the old view of the Lord without giving them a new one. Moreover, men and women are busy about other things. Filled with new interests and new ideas,

they are no longer moved by the contemplation of Heaven's delights or Hell's horrors as once they were.

And so there is unquestionably a falling away, a slackness, an indifference, which to many who still remain in the old camps is a source of great disquietude and anxious thoughts of the future. What are we to do, they say, we who are yet faithful, to rekindle faith in our fellow-men; how shall we give them once more a clear vision of the Lord? One school tells us that if Christians were only faithful to their own standards of living, all would yet be well. We must separate ourselves from the world, shun its interests, distrust its pleasures. We must live literally as though this present world were a more or less hateful incident. We must ascend into Heaven and bring Christ down again from above, that in godly lives, inspired with primitive virtues, men may recognize Him again. Another school assures us that the present distress is due to our apostasy in matters of faith. The form and content of religion was fixed for all time at some moment during the period of the Reformation. Anything that was not believed then cannot be true now. Everything that people in those days firmly held, we must hold too, in just exactly the same form. Evangelical truth alone can save the world from darkness and error; and evangelical truth is

as unchangeable as the Pyramids, as inflexible as the Greek alphabet. They would have us, this school, descend into the depths of old beliefs, old standards. They would have us bring up Christ again from the dead past, and exhibit His lifeless body to the indifferent gaze of a multitude concerned with the things of to-day.

What shall we say of these two counsels, except that the one is unreal, unsatisfying, unpractical, and the other a little too naïve. Men are not so much moved to-day, as once they were, by thoughts of what may happen to them in a future world; nor are they willing to live as though this life were nothing, for they know, on the contrary, that it is very real. They find it also difficult to believe that, while everything else has changed, they are yet bound to clothe themselves in religious garments of antique cut. No! if the mystery of unbelief is great, we must not let ourselves be overborne by it. If the future and the past alike fail to move men's hearts and minds in the way of faith, the present still is ours, and if we can see nothing clearly as yet, still we must have faith in God. It may be that some of us now living will have, as it were, to serve God for nought. Still we must have faith in Him. If there is a God at all, it must be He, and not man, Who is responsible for religion. God began, and He will maintain in His own way,

that communication with man which we call religion ; and while we are in all haste to lead forlorn hopes up into Heaven to bring Christ down, or back into the depths of the past in search of Him, all the time the Word may be very nigh unto us.

“I steadier step when I recall,
That though I slip, Thou dost not fall.”

If men are less sure of Heaven and Hell than they used to be, the Gospel of Christ, as He taught it, was always more occupied with the present than with hereafters. And in the present He does not leave us comfortless.¹ While men believed implicitly in Heaven and Hell, did they accept Christ's authority in other matters? Did they seek to bless their enemies and love their brethren, purify their own hearts, show mercy, avoid vengeance, and make peace half so much as we do? If it is a great and trying mystery to faith that the speculations of men are less evidently occupied with the verities of the faith, is it not yet a greater thing that their consciences are becoming Christianized? Is it altogether a loss that religion should be treated in less formal fashion, less as a thing altogether apart, exempt from criticism? If men are ceasing to sacrifice, or at least to offer the old external sacrifices of a purely formal respect, may they not be begin-

¹ Amen of the Unlearned, p. 18.

ning to hearken, and may not this lead, not to dull acquiescence in an unchallenged probability, but to a spiritual life so real and conscious that every man may come to feel that the Word is nigh him?

We live between the times of the refreshing, and clearly our present duty, as it was the Apostles' after the Ascension, is to wait. We must look out of all this confusion and trouble for the promise. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons, but if we wait on, sure of God's readiness to preserve and protect His own, then we shall certainly receive "power."

Sermon VIII.

SIGNS AND WONDERS.

ST. JOHN IV. 48.

“Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”



OUR Lord had just quitted Judæa and His own particular neighbourhood to escape, not His enemies, but His friends. Rumour was busy with His Name, publicity was being forced on Him, and He did not want publicity. The report of Him had spread through all classes, so that even the Pharisees, who had little respect for popular opinion, had heard that Jesus had made and baptized more disciples than John. The people would have thrust fame upon Him, and He had no desire to be famous. Alone of all the great ones of the earth, He was without any ordinary human ambition, and none knew so well as He that the thirst for fame, which seems to be the most ideal ambition, is in reality the most illusory.

With nothing is appearance so different from

reality as with celebrity. To him who does not, nor is ever likely to possess it, it seems to be the sum total of all that is most splendid. He who, according to the general opinion of his time, possesses it, knows that it brings much more bitterness than satisfaction. "Vanity of vanities," saith the preacher. Of what use is celebrity to a really great man? The popular approval, with all its extravagance, with all its disregard of the finer shades of character, cannot make him greater than he is; while if in a mere gust of wind or a whirl of mere fickleness it is withheld, it cannot lessen his greatness. If it have any value for him it would seem to lie in this, that fame is the conscience of the great, ever sharply reminding him of the disparity between other men's vision of himself and his own. "World renown," said Dante, "is nothing but a break of wind, which blows sometimes from here, sometimes from there, and takes another name, because it comes from another direction."

And so our Lord would not stay in Judæa. "For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country." Fame He could have, but not *honour*, for it is a confusion of thought to assume that the two are identical. Fame is all outward, undiscerning, the mechanical repetition from mouth to mouth of a name, a deed; honour is all inward, discriminating; the reverent homage yielded by

appreciative understanding to spiritual qualities. Fame must sometimes nauseate the sensitive soul with a sense as of the clinging curious touch of a myriad hands about it; but honour—honour of the inward man—while it may abash, must ever be welcome, for it seems to put a man in touch with God, the inspiration of all greatness.

Jesus, then, could not have honour in His own country, and He wished for it, because he who honoured the Son honoured the Father, and the honour of the Father was His life's work. He could not have it, because His own countrymen did not know how to give it. They would crowd round Him as a wonder-worker. They would spread His fame as a prodigy, they would make Him a demagogue—a popular hero—but they would not let Him be a prophet. If He spoke of Himself they would listen, but if He opened out new views of life, spoke new thoughts of God, they said, "Is not this the Carpenter's Son of Nazareth?" and would wax impatient.

Is not this always the case? A man's own people are the first of all to publish his deeds, to revel in his success, to sun themselves in his reflected glory, but they are the last to appreciate the true qualities of his soul. They will be the first to proclaim his knowledge, his ability—the last to understand his wisdom.

And so Jesus, to escape all this, goes down to Galilee, where indeed He finds a change of scene, but no change in the popular understanding. In Samaria, through which region He had passed, He had for a moment received true honour, the honour which belongs to a prophet who speaks of greater things than himself, the honour which is paid to God rather than to man. He had been welcomed there not for any wonderful things which He *did*, but because of His Word, and the welcome was very dear to Him. Those Samaritans had believed, not because of somebody's saying, but because they had heard Him themselves, and hearing, knew Him for the Saviour of the world. But *they* were not His own people. He passes on to Galilee, and finds Himself among the common things of life again. The Galileans received Him not for what He *was*, but as "having seen all the things that He did at Jerusalem." For the moment He was the last cry at the metropolis, which set them the fashion in their estimate of men and things, and so He was sure of a flattering reception in Galilee.

To our Lord all this was very unwelcome. He saw in it a certain lightness of mind, a certain flippancy, belittling the sacredness, the greatness of His purpose; and so He may well have gone to Cana hoping that there at least, among those with

whom He had been on terms of personal friendship, He would find understanding. But no! Cana was the scene of His first wonderful work in Galilee, and the people were all agog for marvels. Hardly had He arrived, apparently, than the customary demand is made. A man whom our translation calls a nobleman, probably one of the household officers of Herod Antipas, "went to Him and besought Him that He would come down and heal His son; for he was at the point of death."

And then at last, in much distaste of the kind of rôle they determined to thrust upon Him, Jesus gives expression to the feeling which filled His mind, and in tones of mingled rebuke and irony exclaimed, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." He seems to have been so weary of it all—the false adulation, the superficial enthusiasm, the vulgar curiosity. This exclamation, if one may say so, seems almost to sound a note of disappointment. It was all so different from what He wanted. He wished to turn their thoughts within, to concentrate them on the eternal interests of human nature, but *they* were content to occupy themselves with passing events and exciting spectacles. He wished to stir the depths of their nature, while they responded to the influence of His presence with a great turbulence in its shallows. He wished to help them find the soul of religion,

while they were content to be fascinated with the dexterous play of its machinery. "Except they saw signs and wonders they would not believe."

Believe what? Why, believe that He was a prophet indeed, believe that He came forth from God: for the God of their traditions, the God of their conceptions, was ever a God Who worked by marvels and portents and prodigies. Jesus Christ had come to close that era, and to show them the real God, Who works ever silently through the living influence of His Holy Spirit in men's hearts and minds; and though they would *have* signs and wonders, He knew quite well that never by that road would they come at a right kind of belief, but only as the result of personal experience gathered from a personal trust in a Living Lord.

But the man who had come to Jesus to seek His aid was a man above the average. Whatever he may have thought when he came, he knew now that he was in the presence of One Who stood on a very different level from that of the mere wonder-worker, and so, putting aside all other considerations, he makes his appeal simply to the great heart of that perfect humanity which never beat so strongly as in unison with the throb of woe. He sums up in it all his needs and all his hope. "Sir, come down, ere my child die."

Our Lord recognizes at once the good quality of the man, and knows that He has already silently accomplished a greater miracle in the field of spiritual operation than any in the material. The man was not one of those who wanted signs and wonders for their own sake. He has recognized the appeal in our Lord's exclamation, he has understood at least in part, and it has brought out his faith and made it really spiritual. This is the kind of disciple the Lord loves to make, and the man should have his desire. Jesus would not "go down," as He had been asked, to work a miracle, but the end should be accomplished in another way. "Go thy way, thy son liveth," is just the simple, natural assurance of a sympathetic man who wishes to comfort and reassure a friend in distress; but the father, in the new found quality of his faith, knows that it means much more than that. He knows that all will be well, that good news will greet him on his return.

And so he does not hurry home in a fever of anxiety. Though he had only a short distance to go, he stays a night on the way, and is not at all surprised when his servants meet him with the assurance that his son lives. Henceforth an even greater interest had entered into his life, for he knew that He Who had put aside the opportunity of increasing His fame by startling the crowd, and

yet in a quiet word of comfort manifested His intimate knowledge of the vital forces of nature, was the greatest prophet of His race, and "himself believed and his whole house."

II. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." If you have vision enough to look down the larger vistas of life you will ever find that there are signs in plenty for those who know how to interpret them. Here in England we have had many such during the last few years. Events of great national import have filled our days and stirred our hearts—events which seemed to shape themselves out of the necessity of things, but events which the faithful mind refers back to the Providence of God. The last perhaps in the present series, though certainly not the least in significance, is that which is taking place to-day—the humble thanksgiving of our Sovereign to his Sovereign for recovery from the sickness which perhaps has given us a better King, and has certainly given him a more devoted people.

As we look upon all these "signs and wonders," and ponder them in our minds, we believe—surely we believe—that our God is not far from any one of us, that in giving our destinies into our own hands to work out He strengthens us for our great task with solemn lessons of comfort and of warning.

But when we look back again to the special and

particular interests of Religion, we find, I think—let us take the discovery for what it is worth—that we are in no particular danger of making the same mistake as the Galileans and those other countrymen of the Lord, at all events of making it in the same way. We are not likely, at any rate in our Church, to be captivated by any display of marvels and prodigies. For signs and wonders as an external force, impressing the mind with a sense of compelled belief, are surely a symbol of authority in Religion, and of all Schoolmasters who formerly ruled and instructed the ancient world, and in some shape or form still rule among us, the principle of Authority in Religion is certainly the most enfeebled in power and reputation.

Some authority there must always be, of course, or Religion would cease to be itself: the authority of a broad rule of right and wrong, recognized as no mere human opportunism, but as having the sanction of Divine Law. The Authority of those general principles of life and conduct which formulated in the Bible have developed themselves into the necessary amenities of a civilized order. But authority in matters of Faith is almost non-existent now, at least amongst Anglo-Saxon peoples. Hardly any intelligent person to-day accepts a religious dogma because he is told to, because it is borne in on him from without, and it is required of him that

his mind should take an accommodating shape. In the earlier ages of Faith it was natural enough that men should submit themselves to this sort of authority. Natural enough when men thought that one particular form of belief was final, the stereotyped expression of the Faith for all ages—natural enough when they thought that their eternal welfare was bound up with its profession. Those were days when all men, at any rate in the West, owed allegiance, for the most part a very willing allegiance, to one and the same religious organization, and when in consequence the will of the Pope went further than the will of the King. There was then little encouragement to be speculative or original in matters of faith, when to be a heretic—and it was very easy to become a heretic—meant not only to be damned in the next world, which was bad, but to be excommunicated in this, which was worse.

The Reformation came and banished all that temper of mind, and with it, unfortunately, some excellent qualities which gathered round it. We are living under quite different conditions. Everything is now questioned as a matter of course, all the old formal beliefs are open to enquiry and criticism, and a flood of light is poured in on them, not by any means entirely through stained-glass windows.

The inspiration of Scripture, for example ; people

are not content to take that as it stands, they want to know what it means, and why it means it. "Signs and wonders," miracles of the Gospels, how do they stand in the modern lights; what is the evidence as to their credibility; how far does the Gospel stand or fall with one or all of them? As to this last much might be said indeed, but it is sufficient for the moment to remind you that our Lord Himself never put them forward as having by themselves any evidential value whatever, but always, as in the text, seemed to show Himself impatient of the demand for them. Science, in bringing all the departments of being under the reign of laws, similar in operation if not identical in kind, has demonstrated the unity of all things as developing on one common principle along the lines of one common plan, and men of to-day are apt to feel impatient of an unconditioned authority that seems to have no root in anything they know, or to be related to any discovered group of facts or sequence of events.

Now all this practical repudiation of authority is inevitable, and in a way—a very real way—it is right. It means that we have advanced a good deal since the days of the Galileans. It means that we have learnt something more of God's ways, that we are on the road to recognize as the dominant power in Religion that "law of liberty" which, as St.

James points out, is the essence of all Christian judgment.

But if we now discard that old obedience to Authority which, in St. Paul's phrase, was the Schoolmaster of our forefathers, to bring them and us through them unto Christ, it is only (to complete the phrase) "that we might be justified by faith." Remember that if what is required of us now is far more agreeable to our emancipated minds than obedience to authority, it is in many ways far more difficult. We are being led out on to a far higher plane of belief than our fathers stood on ; but since to us much has been given, so much more will be required of us. If we are to reason, if we are to analyze, if we are to discriminate between the essentials and the accidents of the Faith, or if we are to enter into the labours of those who do, then we must be justified by that quality of faith which accepts the deep things of the Spirit, and welcomes them on account of their inherent rightness and reasonableness, rather than in obedience to ecclesiastical authority. That is a very different kind of faith from that which sufficed to our fathers. It is the kind which the Lord loves, which He discerned in the father who came to Him to beg the life of his child ; it is what He wants from us—all social, political, scientific, and religious events of the last half century assure us of that. But remember this

is a difficult kind of faith to come by, it needs constant prayer to the Holy Spirit to guide us into it, while for many to-day it must be that or nothing.

III. But if we do not make just the same mistake as the men of Judæa and Galilee made, still we are not altogether free from that spirit which our Lord reprov'd, when at Cana He said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." If we repudiate "signs and wonders" in one direction, we are always expecting to see them in another. Sometimes indeed we do see them, but not nearly so often as we think we have the right to expect. It is not material marvels we look for now, but moral, and there is a strong inclination to rail against Christianity unless it works them. It is a common argument with a certain school of opponents that Christianity cannot be true because it has effected so very little real improvement in the course of its nineteen hundred years' schooling of human nature. You know how frequently one hears it said: "After all these centuries of Christianity what an astonishing thing it is that such an evil should still exist."

Well, it would be an astonishing thing indeed *if* our Lord had entered into a contract with us to save the world by a series of "signs and wonders." But He has not done so. He has, if one may venture the phrase, no more taste for them now than He had on that day at Cana. He has declared that

the world can only be saved through the power of an inward principle of Divine Life developing on its own lines; the gradual filling up of the standards and purposes of humanity with the spirit of Himself.

He has made that promise, and He will keep it. After all, nineteen hundred years—what are they? It would indeed be a “sign and wonder” if the tremendous work of regenerating human nature had been more than begun in so short a time as that. Recent developments in the science of History have largely increased our imagination with regard to the limits of times and periods, and nineteen hundred years seem very little when we reflect that thousands of years before Abraham migrated to Palestine his Chaldæan ancestors were in enjoyment of a highly-cultivated civilization with a comparatively pure form of Religion. Take a narrow view of things, and you will see in them nothing but what is puzzling and disappointing. Stand a little farther off, and take as broad a view as you can, and you will see that along the main lines of its thought and activities, human nature has made some considerable advance since the Light of the World came to guide its ways.

We might be very much more hopeful than we are, if we were more faithful than we are. We want more of the faith that trusts Christ

not for what He has done, but for what He *is*. A faith like that of the man at Cana, in the infinite potentialities of Christ, the faith that sent him quietly about his business, quite confident that all would be well, although he had seen no "sign or wonder," although he had left his son "at the point of death." The world, after all, can be no more ill than that boy was, and he recovered when Jesus Christ took his case in hand.

Ah! indeed, there is something higher than all this superficial faith, and it is this to which God is always calling us. The mere acquiescent belief which yields itself in obedience to external "signs and wonders," whether material or moral, must give way to a freer and less reluctant harmony with God's purposes. "In contrast," said the late Dr. Martineau, "with the *moral* impulse of mind which looks at the differences of things, there is the *spiritual* which seeks their unity; which ascends beyond all diffracted or intercepted rays to the primal light that flings them; and instead of remaining an outside spectator of other beings, it delights to lose itself in the embrace of the all in all, and become the organ of the Eternal Will."

Let us seek this spiritual mind "which was also in Christ Jesus." Let us be ready to interpret signs if they are given us, but let us not demand them as a right, or as the condition of our belief. And


let us hold, as the guiding principle which regulates our attitude towards the mingled conditions of life, this profound reflection of the ancient Psalmist: "I see that all things come to an end, *but* Thy Commandments are exceeding broad."

Sermon IX.

POLITICS AND RELIGION.

ST. MATT. XXII. 20, 21.

“And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto Him, Cæsar's. Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.”

 POLITICS and Religion are but different ways of expressing the same truth, that human life has a larger purpose than can be expressed in the aims and activities of any one age or period. That in the continuity of its records, though the necessary links can sometimes be supplied only by a bold inference, there gradually unfolds a meaning of almost infinite content.

Life, indeed, as we learn the better every day, opens out to us with more and more of hope and promise. No longer does it appear as a collection of hard unrelated facts, with its puzzle of cross purposes, but in all the wonder and mystery of a

unity, where things that seem all asunder reveal unexpected affinities, and local differences are merged in a universal likeness. More clearly does the high compelling voice of Destiny bid us leave the tasks of children who painfully acquire the meaning of each separate lesson, and live as men ; seeing the relations of things, discerning the hidden shape of principle, the free sweep of law. There is indeed a science of living, and politics and religion, rightly conceived, are simply different ways of learning it.

It is perhaps, then, a little saddening to recall to mind that it is just these very subjects, which by universal prescription are debarred from discussion in all the social gatherings of gentlemen. It is saddening, I say, for it reminds us of what we would like to forget, that Politics and Religion, though at one end they deal with the loftiest concerns of human speculation, nevertheless at the other have their roots in a soil that is often polluted with the exudations of human bitterness, infected with the fever of jealousy and vanity. And thus we see that these two studies which practically cover the whole of life, and might almost regenerate it, are constantly used to confuse the minds of the simple, obscure plain issues, and obstruct the stream of truth. To practise your politics and your religion with comfort to yourselves, and safety to others,

you need to remember that in the hands of the careless and imprudent they may develop dangerous qualities—pettifoggery and question-begging. Forget this, and you will find that either, singly, can make a man a short-sighted, narrow-minded pedant, and that both combined can transform him into a dangerous and cruel tyrant.

I. Now in the Gospels we only get just a glimpse here and there of the politics of the time, and then it is generally of their lower ends rather than of their higher developments. Political feeling in Jewry was entirely dominated by one idea—that passionate retention of a separate nationality which is the general characteristic of small peoples. The Jewish race, in its chequered career, had more than once seen its independence reduced almost to the vanishing point, but never hitherto had it been actually extinguished. Now they felt at last the iron grip of the Roman dominion implacably closing on the throat of their national life, and, with all the strength of a proud and obstinate spirit, bitterly resented the alien rule. Glorifying in the possession of an imperishable literature, mindful of their splendid past in which they had moved as one of the world's great forces, their resentment of political extinction was kept alive and intensified by the outraged religious sentiment in which they saw the Holy City of the chosen people of God in the hands

of a heathen and barbarian soldiery. Politics and Religion were busy developing their most dangerous qualities in Jerusalem in our Lord's day, and afforded ready weapons in the hands of men of mean minds and jealous temper against One Whose principles they disliked, and of Whose way of life they disapproved.

And so we are not at all surprised to find that the Pharisees, representing a religious ideal which Jesus had openly disregarded, when, as we read, they had "taken counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk," took as allies the Herodians, representatives of a political idea with which He had shown little sympathy. It was a remarkable alliance this, foreshadowing some familiar combinations in modern politics: a temporary co-operation between two parties who mutually detested one another for the purpose of discrediting an opponent whom they hated still more. For there can have been little love lost between the Pharisees, strong theocratic opponents of the Roman rule as they were, and the Herodians, hangers-on of a dynasty created by Cæsar, dependents of a family notoriously lax in their religious observances.

Between them, with great subtlety, they devise an ugly conspiracy, which, under the cover of eliciting from Him a quite natural expression of opinion, they hope will ruin Jesus. For the question intended

to be put to Him, while quite harmless in appearance, and apparently a very proper one to ask of a public person who claimed to be the representative of his race, in reality concealed a double-mouthed trap, into which He was almost certain to fall. With a preliminary flourish of flattery, acknowledging His single-mindedness in a hateful smirk of false compliment, they come to Jesus, and say, "Tell us therefore, is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?" If He answered "No," the Herodians would be witness against Him to the Roman Governor; if He answered "Yes," the Pharisees would see to it that the people should know how He had hopelessly compromised Himself with the Roman conquerors, and they would soon make short work of His claims to be the Messiah, the national deliverer.

Our Lord not only detects their plot, but He answers their question, and in answering teaches them, and us, a deep lesson. Calling for a piece of money, He asks them, "Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto Him Cæsar's."¹ Now there was a saying of the Rabbis, "Wherever any king's money is current, there that king is lord." And the saying really embodies a sound political instinct, which tells us that if you accept the protection of a Government, which alone ensures for

¹ Alford, Gk. Test. loc.

you those conditions under which property can be owned and money be passed, then to refuse it its just dues is an act of rebellion. The Lord's answer then convicts them, by the matter of fact that this money was current among them, of subjection to Cæsar, and therefore, by the implication, of the recognition of their subjection. "Render, therefore, unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's," and which was theirs only because they were his; and, not perhaps without reference to the Herodians, but certainly also with a much deeper reference, "unto God the things that are God's."

Realizing that they were foiled in their purpose, and foiled too by a wisdom beyond the reach of political venom and religious wrong-headedness, the band of conspirators, "when they heard these words, marvelled, and left Him, and went their way."

II. This famous aphorism has been not a little misunderstood, and this misunderstanding I believe to be the root of certain demonstrations of political and religious sentiment which we are somewhat at a loss to account for amongst a people like our own who are not much prone, one would say, to be led away by ideas.

Now what the Pharisees were trying to do, for theirs was the design, and the Herodians were only brought in as a makeweight, was not only to gratify personal spite, but also to capture the authority of

religion, and forcibly bind it to the triumphal car of a particular political prepossession. It is not altogether uncommon for similar attempts to be made in these days, not, one fears, without some measure of success. But you will note that in His answer to the Pharisees our Lord not only gives them no countenance, but clearly intimates that they are the fruit of an entire misunderstanding of the real position.

It has been supposed that our Lord's counsel to render to Cæsar what was his, and to God what is His own, is an intimation to Christians to separate, both in thought and deed, their political and religious duties. We are, of course, familiar with the man whose political views make him rather a bad Christian, and we understand him, if we do not sympathize with him. But many people find it difficult to understand or sympathize with the views of those Christians, who act so literally on their own reading of our Lord's instruction that they let their religion make them, in the eyes of most of their fellow-countrymen, bad citizens. ¹In view of a certain section of opinion, we are inclined to ask ourselves, with rather a puzzled feeling, if we are all then so very much worse Christians than we thought ; or are we not rather to distrust the kind of religion, which being at least in general outline the same as

¹ Preached during the War in South Africa.

that professed by the majority of people around him, makes a man take sides against his own country?

I venture to suggest, with all respect to honest opinion, that the answer lies in the fact that our Lord's words have not the significance thus attached to them, but, indeed, a precisely opposite one. That, in fact, they bind together, instead of separating, the political and religious duties of the followers of Christ.

For consider, and you will see that "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," is not really two separate statements, but one. For the first and smaller is merged in the second and infinitely greater. What is Cæsar's is only his because it is given him of God, from Whom is all power. And this is a truth which is given frequent expression to both in the Old Testament and the New. Our Lord Himself, in the presence of His earthly judge, while protesting against a criminal travesty of legal justice, nevertheless recognizes the authority which lay behind it, when He said, "Thou couldst have no power at all against Me unless it were given thee from above." St. Paul, in an age of bitter persecution, exhorts every soul to be subject unto the higher powers. "For there is no power but of God: for the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore

resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." St. Peter again has the same truth in view when he says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake"—no very palatable advice, one would suppose, to Christians of that day. And in the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah, dealing with the false religious idealism of his time, has the following significant passage: "Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you to remove you from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the Lord; and they shall till it and dwell therein."

And so the Pharisees might detest Cæsar, and highly disapprove of the idea of which he was the living embodiment, but nevertheless he was God's instrument, and a true respect for God would issue in a respect for the authority which God permitted. This is a truth then of which we need to be reminded, that our Lord refused His authority to those who deny their support to the Government under which they live in the name of religion. For

many strange things are said and done in the Name of Christ.

For example, when those who claim to speak in the name of the religion of Christ denounce the "immorality" of a course of policy which is personally distasteful to them, then all we can say is, that between nation and nation there can be no judge except Time. The only test which a nation can apply to the morality of its policy is to be found in its own self-respect. When, again, those who dislike a display of force, tell us that Christianity forbids its use, we must reply that Christ Himself "came not to bring peace upon earth, but a sword," and that He is reported to have used force Himself in clearing the House of God of its too businesslike frequenters. And to the dictum that "force is no remedy," we must answer that this is only a half-truth, perhaps not even that. That whereas the rights of the individual are claims recognized by the State, which, if necessary, will enforce them, the claims of the nation can be enforced only by the nation itself. "Between the consciences of two individuals," as a well-known political essayist puts it,¹ "the law and the policeman can mediate. But a nation must be its own law and its own policeman. Its mission to exist requires it to have a will of its own, and a force with which its will can be backed

¹ Spenser Wilkinson. *The Great Alternative.*

up. The force is to be found only in the stout hearts and good right arms of its subjects, and the necessity to have such a force is the origin and foundation of those duties of the citizen, upon the performance of which depends the possibility of his having rights."

Is not this then more like the true view: that God's field of action is infinitely wider than our personal dislikes and prejudices, our sense of the fitness of things, our notions of justice and religion, will sometimes permit us to acknowledge. That the manifest destiny of a great people, expressed in a policy anxiously considered and generally approved, has all the force and weight of a Law of Nature, and is no more "immoral" than such a law, which is indeed part of the law of God. And that, finally, when we combine politics and religion, it must be not for the satisfaction of a party claim, or for the tyrannical enforcement of local prejudice, but in an effort to understand the science of living. Then we seem to see that if God's ways are past finding out and many of His purposes beyond our ken, nevertheless, in the honour we render to His laws, and in the reverence we have for His will, we have no warrant, while accepting for ourselves the protective care of Cæsar's government, for refusing to render unto Cæsar that support, material or moral, which is his right and due, when, on our behalf, it must speak with "the enemy in the gate."

III. But while you may feel inclined to admit the importance of the application to public affairs of the principle enunciated by our Lord in the text, we must not fail to consider also its application to private life. If it is true that in the broad purposes and great ends of earthly government we have a right to look for and recognize the order of God's Providence, even if the practical means which necessity uses often lag behind our ideal conceptions, then the converse of this is true also. I mean that if a disinterested and sober patriotism appeals to the supreme government of the universe for the sanction of its own inspirations and the protection of its own security, then it is important to remember that an open recognition of God's power and honour is a private and individual duty.

A spiritual patriotism is a fine and attractive thing, but I do not think it can ever take the place of specific religious duty. While most of us are convinced that our duty requires us to render to Cæsar what is Cæsar's, many of us are not so careful to render to God what is God's. No nation can go far to work out its appointed destiny that has not a belief in itself, and the pride of pomp and circumstance, and the greatness of material resource are not altogether illegitimate subjects of satisfaction. But the keystone of the British Empire is not the British fleet, but the moral and spiritual con-

sciousness which is in the hearts of the people, and on every heart the daily habits of life should write the words of the Angel to that great patriot Zerubabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Are we all as careful as we should be to keep alive in our hearts the Spirit of God?

It is a great and growing mistake to suppose that because a man has a kind of belief that the universe is not self-existent he can safely leave off all religious practice. It is of vastly more importance than he knows that week by week he should publicly profess his belief in God the Father, Maker of Heaven and earth, and if the service of God involves some self-denial, that will be no bad preparation for the day when his country may demand of him all that he has. It is of deep importance, I am convinced, that the habit of private prayer be not lost. For 'tis this conscious effort on man's part to bring his life into the presence of God which most helps to preserve his self-respect. And if national self-respect is the only test of the morality of public policy, individual self-respect is by far the safest test of the morality of private conduct.

No one who has reached even early middle age can fail to be conscious that there is growing up amongst us a standard of right and wrong much freer and more elastic than that of his early years.

This is not so deplorable as may be supposed, for all that makes for freedom makes for manhood. But we need to be on our guard that freedom does not degenerate into license, elasticity into laxity. Wherever your private life may be spent—in the shop, in the country house, in the office, in the parish or the church, bring it weekly, publicly, and openly into the House of God and lay it before Him in worship ; and quietly, day by day, before Him in prayer and meditation ; and be sure that He will so take care of it, that what of your life and goods you render unto Cæsar shall be all the more worth giving because you have first rendered it unto God.

Sermon X.

THE PRICE OF PROGRESS.

DEUT. xxxiv. 5, 6.

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”



THUS did the compiler of Deuteronomy, writing centuries after the event, seek to account for what to him and his people must always have seemed a very extraordinary fact, that not the slightest trace could be discovered of any sepulchre enshrining the hallowed bones of the greatest and most venerated figure in all the national history.

Extraordinary, I say, it must have seemed to him, because it was an age-long custom of his race to provide a permanent resting-place for the dead. The oldest traditions bore witness how their ancestors, from Abraham downwards, had acquired land,

or otherwise made provision for the dead. The whole country was dotted with the bones of the departed, and the royal mausoleums at Jerusalem were splendid witnesses to the strength of the pious feeling which ordained that a man should be laid to rest with his fathers.¹ The family grave was holy ground, and a permanent possession. The family might lose their estate, but never their ancestral tomb; for in selling land no Hebrew would dispose of his burying-place, to the use of which his descendants were entitled for all time. Early Israel certainly had no very definite belief as to an after-life, but people of the age of the Deuteronomic writer certainly did believe that the spirits of the unburied dead wandered restlessly abroad, or lay in the dimmest recesses of the pit, if indeed they were admitted into Sheol at all. To be deprived of burial, then, was the last indignity, the greatest calamity, which could fall on a man and his family. To prepare for himself a tomb in his lifetime had been the custom of every right-thinking Israelite from the earliest times down to the present day. Joseph of Arimathea is a case in point.

Now Moses died, it is true, before the settlement in Canaan, but tradition recorded that he met his end in the land of Moab, and that was only just over the border, on the other or eastern side of

¹ v. Art. Hastings' Bib. Dict.

Jordan. If he had died while the people were yet in the wilderness it would have been another matter, but it would have been impossible to have forgotten or to have overlooked a site so renowned as a sepulchre in Moab, if there had ever been one. To the Deuteronomic writer it would be simply unthinkable that his countrymen should have left the body of their revered leader without burial; and so, like many a chronicler of later times, he calls upon his piety and his faith to fill up the page which history had left blank. Man had never borne the hero to his burial, no human hand had ever dug his rock-hewn grave. But what if Jahweh Himself had rendered the last offices to His servant, what if the hand which gave Him sepulture had been divine? Had not Elijah in more recent times been borne to his rest by the very hand of God, and should Moses, a greater man even than he, be accorded any less honour. It must have been so, and if no man knows of his sepulchre, it was because no *man* built it.

So the old writer, according to the manner of his time, repairs the breaches of history, and testifies to his own faith in Jahweh's power and care of his people.

I. But however doubtful may be the Deuteronomist's record from the historical point of view, poetically and indeed religiously it is invaluable. With the wonderful restraint of a supremely-inspired

art, he suggests a picture of the last moments of his hero.

And weird it is, deeply impressive and strangely pathetic. Full of years, and yet wearing no sign of decay, full of cares, and yet with unspent vigour, unweakened resolve, he knows (some secret voice whispering the hour of his fate) that his day is over. Secretly he leaves the camp, and sets forth unattended on his last mysterious journey. Alone he scales the heights of Nebo, and there, on the topmost summit of the mountain, as the full light of day floods the distant horizon, he looks out with far-seeing eye over the land he may never know. Like some great eagle aloft there between earth and Heaven, with untamed imperious glance, he takes in all the fair promise which the genius of his leadership has brought within the grasp of that little family now waiting far below him. "All the land of Gilead unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea; and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar." Still gazing out, his thoughts turn within, and he communes with his own soul. He looks back over all the long years which have passed since his God first inspired him to consecrate his life to the great purpose. The early years in Egypt, the awful dangers, the breathless excitements of the

mission to Pharaoh. He broods over the trials, troubles, unconquerable delays, the stubborn and unending disappointments of the weary years in the wilderness. He remembers his temptations, how often he has nearly come to the point of abandoning a people who would not trust him to their own folly, and pressing on with a few chosen spirits.

As he thinks on these things; of all they have been to him, and he to them, his heart goes out in yearning to the people whom he loves, and is wrung with sorrow that he must leave them just when they seem to need him the most. He sees his mistakes, his failures, his sins—how often his faith has failed to wait in patience on the slow ways of God; and with the convincing evidence of the Divine Providence before his eyes, he bows his head in the humility of a deep repentance. And then, as the day waxes, and his time grows short, he places himself in the presence of God and rests there in solemn communing with the Divine Spirit. The hours go by, and, as time and sense fade away, his mind is illumined with a sure prophetic insight to comprehend all the wide issues of the promise as it finds its goal in a people that shall be born to serve the Lord; and now that his eyes have seen the salvation, his soul is satisfied, and he knows that he may depart in peace. Once more he looks out, but the shadows lengthen and gather from all sides. The

tents of the people glimmer white for a moment, and then suddenly sight fails, for night is upon him and swallows him up—"The night cometh when no man can work." He is alone in that deathly solitude, alone on the edge of the awful precipice, and yet not alone, for God is now all in all, and God is with him. He, who through all his long life so hardly has learnt to do the will of God, makes the last act of faith and submission, and then comes the end. The body topples back, perhaps, over the abyss, and comes to rest in some deep ravine never more to be seen of man, but the mighty soul has rendered itself to the Everlasting.

Such is the picture, moving and dramatic which the old writer seemed to suggest to our imagination. He was wrong, doubtless, when in the thought of his time he sees Jahweh raising some mighty cairn over the bones of His servant, but he was right in all the essentials. For he saw that, though the hero died, as it seemed, untimely, yet that his spirit and purpose lived on in the history of his people, and that just as the body of Moses lay hidden from mortal view, so the lives of men, and the histories of men, are resolved into the hidden purpose of God.

II. Now this account of the death of Moses, so condensed, and yet so suggestive, seems to propose to us two principles which we may expect to find in our normal experience of life, both of which

indeed are quite obvious ; but none the less on that account seem to be in place on such a landmark as the first Sunday in the New Year.

And the first of these is that no human activity which is really founded on the consciousness of some definite purpose bears its ripest fruit except in the future. Each generation, however much it may seem to be absorbed in its own interests, works not really for itself, but for a generation to come. That sense of incompleteness, of disappointment, which so often hangs like a cloud over the best work—work which has conscience, enthusiasm, and duty in it—is not final, it is only the veil which hides the land of promise from the gaze of the tired worker. Moses had to lay down his life's work and forego his own reward just as it seemed within his grasp, but yet he found his vindication in the greatness of a people whom, more than any, he had striven to make. He had to leave go of all the vital interests with which his life was bound up, as it were before his time, and yet time proved that he was right.

And so, just in proportion as any work is strong and brave and patient, it must bear to see itself lie under the stigma of a partial failure. It is part of the discipline of character by which a man may know that God is calling him to put forth his best powers.

This is a principle which one can easily recognize on the broad field of national life. We are deeply conscious that the finest activities of our time—intellectual, social, and moral—are more than half prophetic, and can never come to maturity in this our day. They do but lay the foundations on which another generation must build. Schemes are laid, plans are worked out in this and that direction, for the regeneration of national life; they are laid aside, forgotten, merged into the dust and debris which the vast forces of life unceasingly strew behind them, so that no man knows their sepulchre. And yet, if there was any soul of good in them, it lives on and animates the ever-growing body of society. It is only an every-day illustration of the truth that “the things which are *seen* are temporal, but the things which are *not* seen are eternal.”

It is so much harder to welcome this principle in individual life that we too often allow ourselves to turn aside from following out life's hidden purpose, and take refuge in a deliberate sense of ill-usage. And yet if we have set ourselves to try, by however small a degree, to make our own little corner of the world brighter, cleaner, and more honest, be sure that we shall fail of that which we consider to be our proper reward. To everyone who works, ever so little, for the good of others, God proposes only one reward, and that is Himself.

Self-respect, eagerness for results, a delight in fine employment, will carry us for some time through laborious duties ; but in the end invariably ensues a feeling of weariness if life yields no higher impulse. The sameness of the task generates carelessness, want of success begets impassiveness and indolence. There is only one thing which will support us to the end in the cause of truth, in any cause not merely our own, and that is the felt consciousness of serving God. This is the only motive which, being independent of success, becomes ever more stimulating as time goes on, and so has the tendency to produce an ever-increasing energy. This is the principle which takes at once out of the list of real failures all those careers of honour and usefulness which are often so strangely cut short at the most critical moments : which make what would otherwise be the bitterest disappointment of a man's hope, the consummation of his highest will.

If we believe at all in the rationality of this present scheme of things, if we believe at all that life is a cosmos, and not a chaos, then surely the fact that the best men are content to work not by sight, but by faith, only in the power of an unconquerable hope, is the weightiest evidence our souls can own that life and love are stronger even than death.

III. And the second principle which seems to disengage itself from the Deuteronomist's account

of the death of the great national leader is just as obvious as the former—it is that progress has its price—that the process of levelling up must be paid for by the loss or disappearance of some lesser good.

It is shown in the history of Israel. The paternal government of Moses had shaped and moulded the national character on definite lines. His strong hand, under God, had laid down the lines of their advance. He had guided their errant inclinations, had taught them the duty of obedience to a higher law than that of their own wills, and his death marked a crisis in their destiny. God was calling them on to a freer, fuller development. They were to emerge out of the incoherence of scattered tribes, each with its own law and customs, into the unity of a nation, but often in time to come, the strong hand of the leader withdrawn, they had to learn again on a higher plane the simple lessons of their earlier state. The price of their progress was the loss of the power of ready obedience.

And this principle is seen at work in many ways in individual life. Most obviously, of course, in this, that as we grow older, as character matures, and our capacity for usefulness enlarges, our strength to perform decreases. We lose the activity of youth, the motive power of life runs down, and the monotony of habit puts a drag on the wheels

of spontaneity. As we come to a juster appreciation of the value of things, as life emerges from the uncritical to the selective stage, as we come to know better what to enjoy, so our power for enjoyment seems to shrink. Tastes grow finer and more fastidious as years go on, but the art of living to the full only becomes more difficult thereby, as the imagination ceases to respond to things which interested and captivated us when the world was newer.

You see the same principle at work in national life, as the body politic becomes more highly organized. As a people grows in intelligence and appreciation, as its enterprise stretches out in a wider grasp, so does it seem to lose the hardier virtues, the more sustaining faiths of its simpler state. The early reaches of any stage of national progress are too often seen to be strewn with precious broken things, habits of self-restraint, self-respect, simple godliness, which the people have thrown aside in their eager rush to get on to something richer, more promising, and more satisfying. It is a commonplace of the present day that for power gained in the progress of national education, we have had to pay a not inconsiderable price in an access of vulgarity, thriftlessness, and want of manners.

And not less is it true in the spiritual life that for progress you have to pay a price. At every stage of spiritual development the Master seems to

say to us all, as He said to St. Peter, "Where I go thou canst not follow Me now," and if, like the Apostle, we insist on following, it may only be to find, as he did, that we have to pay for our courage with the heavy price of a partial denial. As our faith grows more mature, more reasonable, as it reaches out from one precious truth to another, and tries to see things new and old in their connexions rather than in their separateness, so does the sense of God's presence in our lives seem to lose something of its immediacy, its awfulness, and what we gain in holy joy we are apt to lose in holy fear. As we come more and more to spiritual manhood we find the simpler exercises of faith more and not less difficult. Specially is this so with prayer. As God permits us to lift the veil which hides from the natural eye the splendid vision of His truth, as He condescends to deal with us as with men, it seems hard to go back, as it appears, to the simple prayer in which we can never approach our Father but as children. But we may not walk too freely in the spacious ways of truth lest we lose our power of reverence, and only "he who wonders shall reign." The real fact is, that however richly God may deal with us in other ways, in prayer we are meant to be child-like. The Lord's prayer is the utterance of a child rather than of a man. However much we think we can see, however much we think we have

outgrown, we may not lose hold of the simple support of prayer lest we lose hold on humility.

Progress has its price, but we must see to it that in our eagerness to make a bargain we do not pay more than we ought. The price demanded is too high if, in order to follow the track, we are required to close our eyes to the nature of the country we are passing through. It is convenient to think of all movement as progress, but it is misleading ; for progress is not merely movement, but movement in the right direction.

"Progress whence, and progress whither?" Disraeli used to ask.¹ "The only human progress worth calling by the name is progress in virtue, justice, courage, uprightness, love of country beyond love of ourselves. True, as everyone says, it is impossible to go back ; but why? To go back is easy if we have missed our way on the road upwards. It is impossible only when the road is downhill."

¹ Froude. Life.

Sermon XI.

EXTRAVAGANCE.

I COR. IX. 25.

“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.”



SAINT PAUL was perhaps the most broad-minded enthusiast who ever lived. In him singleness of heart never degenerated into fanaticism, sincerity of belief never hardened into bigotry. His whole being was possessed by an all-conquering idea which formed the very habit of his life, yet his mind never lost its suppleness; while, so far as any man can be, he was absolutely free from the prevailing vices of the religious idealist, narrowness and lack of sympathy.

In the great work he had been called to attempt, the enormously difficult work of winning the variously-constituted mind of the cultured world of his day to recognition of the universality of the Gospel, he early seems to have determined that there

was only one possible road to success. Completely convinced as he was of the entire truth of his own beliefs, he yet must not allow himself to be captured by them. He must be their master rather than their servant. His action, his methods, must not be predetermined by the requirements of any hard and fast tradition. He must be mentally and morally free to deal with any situation as it arose. Men must not be able to say beforehand of him that as a Jew, a Roman, a Christian preacher, he would do or say this or that, take such and such a line. Sincerity of mind he would wed to unexpectedness of method. Was the Jew inclined to mistrust him as a renegade and traitor to Abraham, he should find him as rigid as any Pharisee, as learned in the law as any Rabbi. Did the Gentile prepare to despise him as a fanatic, obstinate Jew, he would meet him on his own ground and advocate his Master's cause from the side of philosophy or of natural religion. Was it a question of the "weak," some poor widow, or some dull, ignorant slave, they would find in him nothing formidable or awe-inspiring. For Paul the strong, Paul the learned, Paul the great protagonist, knew how, by the mere "foolishness of preaching," the unadorned statement, the simple argument, the homely illustration, the fervour and unction of a strong emotion, to fan a glowing spark of faith and save them which should believe.

Here was the cause of his success, that he was all things to all men, and that without the slightest loss of sincerity, without the least disturbance of faith, using neither the craft of simulation or the guile of dissimulation; but because he could honestly put himself at any point of view, and, for the time being, see the appearance of things just as that other, be he Jew, Gentile, strong or weak, saw them.

Yes; but *how* was he able to do all this? What was the secret of this extraordinary versatility that never invited distrust by hint of artifice, that never provoked resentment by a suggestion of superiority? "I am *made*," he says, "all things to all men that I might by all means save some." What a volume of personal history is condensed in that little phrase, "I am made." The secret of it all was self-mastery. He who was to use the high diplomacy of an ambassador for Christ, had first to put himself to school with Christ, and in that school had learned to use with himself an iron, rigid discipline. Here was a man, who with the intense conservatism which he had by inheritance, race, and early training, combined a large capacity for idealism, an eager, impulsive mind, a fervent disposition, a gift of ready expression, a passionate and even pugnacious temper. A man, one would say, born to take sides; a man who, once thoroughly convinced, would carry out

his beliefs to the bitter end with the terrible repellent logic of the revolutionary. But it would have been fatal to have taken sides—fatal to the success of his delicate work as an ambassador to have obtruded his own personal or racial predilections.

And so he who was naturally intemperate deliberately set himself to become temperate *in all things*, that he might learn to use all means, as not engrossed in any, with the sure handling of a master.

He beat his body—for that is the force of the original Greek—that the nervous, irritable organization, the sharp and ready tongue, should be submissive to his will.

He who had early known, in his comfortable home, the elegancies and pleasures of a refined existence, threw it all over, worked at his trade till his fingers were all black and broken, lived on a bare subsistence—crucified his flesh with the affections and lusts that he might be free to preach the Gospel without reproach.

He, who in a natural pride of race would esteem the civilization of Roman Asia but as a mushroom growth of yesterday, yet embarked with ardour in the study of alien thought and alien literature, “that an ambassador of Christ might not be discredited in the schools.”

He, who must have known himself to be in many ways their superior, yet counted himself as the least

of all the Apostles—as not worthy to be called an Apostle—because of the sinful blindness, the un-Christlike cruelty of his persecuting days.

He, who had such a passion for holiness that he saw in the body of the baptized a Temple of the Holy Ghost, suffers none of his horror to appear in the presence of the foulest abominations among his flock, and rebukes even the most outrageous offences against purity with the gentleness of the saint, rather than the rigour of the moralist.

This man who craved affection, who, as pathetic remembrances of his beloved Timothy show, had the tenderest heart in the world, yet never gave way to his feelings, sternly repressed sentiment, and in two crises of his life—at Ephesus and Cæsarea—in parting for ever from people who loved him, would have no undue display of grief, and even rebuked the lack of self-restraint in those who would not hold themselves in, but wept and broke his heart.

Temperate in all things—this was what he had been *made*—that he might use all means, without the risk of being captivated by any.

“You have seen the athletes,” he says, “contesting in the races. You have admired the graceful form, the smooth and supple skin, the muscles of steel, the beautiful easy movement. You have marvelled at the concentration, the power of endurance, the vigour of mind and body which the victor dis-

plays. Well, you know the secret of all this—it is training. The man who runs to win has had to master all his inclinations, curb self-indulgence, be temperate in all things. You see the magnificent result, but you have not seen the long, quiet course of preparation; you have not seen how the man has had to struggle with himself before he has been fit to contend with others. What he has done, I have done. Could I do less, who hope to wear in the presence of my Master the unperishing crown of His gracious approval with the same proud gladness with which the athlete wears his honours in the presence of the applauding company?

And what I have done, you must do. The Christian who hopes to live to the Glory of God, and that is your incorruptible crown, cannot afford to neglect his soul. If he is to live at peace and charity with all men, he must master the pride, the obstinacy, and self-sufficiency of the natural man. If he is to move free and detached amidst the enticements of the world, he must learn to be temperate in his ambitions, temperate in his appetite for pleasure, temperate in his desire for recognition, and learn to yield not even to the soft compulsion of his own kindness of heart. If he is not to be moulded by his surroundings, if he is not to conform to every habit of life and thought which fashion or folly may dictate, it must be because

on the lonely mountain-top of prayer and meditation he has learned not to be afraid of solitude. If he is to learn the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, it must be because he has not dissipated the power of thought and attention in the petty indulgences of the fribbling mind. If, in a word, Christ is to be formed in him; if, in an inward power of selection, he is to transform the crude material of the world into holiness, wisdom, love of man, and love of God, it must be because he has stood guardian over his own life, and has known what to exclude as well as what to admit. "So run that ye may obtain."

II. At no time has it ever been easy to acquire this Christian habit of self-restraint, and I dare say that it has never been more difficult to do so than at the present time. For we live in an age of general extravagance, of extravagant habits, extravagant language, extravagant curiosity. We are constantly alluding with pride to the fact that the standard of comfort has greatly risen during the last half century or so, and in comparing the conditions under which the mass of our people live with those which obtain in other lands, we congratulate ourselves, not that the Englishman does his work more thoroughly and conscientiously than anyone else, but that he knows his own worth, and will not put up with the lower rate of wages and the barer living

which the poor foreigner has to do with. On many subjects he is more or less indifferent. You may tell him that his organization for national defence is in a disgracefully chaotic condition, and he is not greatly perturbed ; you might uproot the ancient Church of the land, disendow it, and generally spoliage it, and very possibly he would not greatly care, but touch him in his comfort and your Englishman cries out in wrath.

Amongst the great nations of the world we have been, at all events until quite recently, the most lightly taxed of any, and yet we are always complaining of our burdens. We are just now suffering under a spell of financial depression, partly due, no doubt, to the discharge of imperial responsibilities, but quite as much, we are told, to the extravagant expenditure of the last few years. We all must have the latest improvements. Municipalities borrow vast sums, often, perhaps, without quite knowing how the debts are to be discharged, all to raise the standard of comfort and luxury. It is indeed amazing to what extent the care and nurture of the body enters into our calculations ; and when everybody takes an interest in "treatments," even its aberrations form an absorbing topic of conversation. We all must live softly and lie warmly nowadays ; it is becoming more and more the fashion to spend considerable sums of money on amusements, even

on mere feeding, which it is by no means always easy or prudent to afford. The desire of the poor or moderately endowed to live beyond their means grows by dwelling on the example of the rich, who only live up to theirs. We look, almost in vain, for the example of one who, voluntarily and out of purposed submission to a higher law, keeps under his body and brings it into subjection.

But it is when we come to consider the literal meaning of extravagance that we realize how our times are infected by it. You know, I daresay, what that meaning is—it is wandering—wandering at large, aimlessly, outside rule and order. Some ages have been priest-ridden, or at least we think they have, others warrior-ridden—ours is newspaper-ridden. And the aim of the newspaper is to make everything easy and pleasant for everybody. It must be vivid; it must bring things home to its readers; it must, in the atrocious parlance of the day, “get there.” And so it piles on its adjectives, flourishes its capitals, hangs out its flaming head-lines, encourages extravagant speech and extravagant disregard of the right proportions of things, that all may see, and thrill, and buy. The doings of exalted persons, the entertainments of the rich, are chronicled with a minute, one might almost say a loving care, even in the most democratic journals, for the sake of ministering to the idle, aimless curiosity of people

who probably do not know them by sight, and by no conceivable circumstance are ever likely to exchange a word with them.

This atmosphere of monstrous advertisement in which we all live—where the skyscraper points higher than the Church steeple, and the beat of the showman's drum is more insistent than the Church bell—is a fatal encouragement for that flaccid, easily moved sentiment in which we are too prone to believe that the first care of a civilized community is to make provision for everybody to do exactly as they please. Humanitarianism, we *call* it, which, translated into plain language, means that since it is inconvenient to control your feelings, you are not expected to make any attempt to do so.

The newspaper dearly loves a man with a grievance. He writes a letter to let all the world know how he has been unjustly treated, or how he has heard of someone else who has suffered injustice—that is one of our favourite words—and in a trice the columns are full of letters from other correspondents who are all in a fine fury of sentimental indignation over some favourite martyr's woes. If you suffer wrongfully, or what you think is wrongfully, do not take it patiently is the modern variant of the apostolic injunction. When we are hurt, even if we have deserved it, we consider it the very quintessence of dignity to cry out. If you would be

popular you must sob at intervals over your own pin-pricks or somebody else's—it does not matter which.

And all this new humanitarianism, which is old self-indulgence prettily disguised, is breeding a very ugly spirit of indiscipline amongst us, which is much more evident than we care to see in the relations between children and their teachers and parents. The schoolmaster of old held that there is a faculty called memory which can be acted on through the human skin. If he ventures to act on that belief now, a righteously indignant parent hauls him before the magistrate. Kind-hearted persons—of whom there is almost an unwholesome glut—are shocked on being told that small children are punished for inattention in school. They do not reflect that it is to their advantage that they should be taught to apply their minds to their work. We are told that the great fault in our education is its failure to *interest* the children. Perhaps. But if they are to be brought up to do nothing which does not attract them, they will come into life very ill-prepared to take part in the struggle for existence. Work, unhappily, consists to a very large extent in doing tiresome things, because they must be done. The faculty of mastering dull lessons is certainly not the least useful part of the generally slender baggage we bring away from school. It is not a

little disturbing to read the number of cases in which persons apply to the magistrate for help in controlling their own children of tender years. If a little boy or little girl won't obey—well, it's too much trouble to find some means of making them, and so they run wild, or get out of hand.

Then the newspaper régime spoils us in another way. It keeps us in touch with events certainly, but it encourages inattention : for in these days of quick communication so many things are happening at the other end of the wire that we are quite annoyed if we do not get a new sensation every day. We wander round the outside of all great matters, but our interest in them is rarely sufficiently concentrated to be more than "sporting," as we say. It seems hardly worth while to go to the trouble of making up one's own mind about anything when one can get a fluent opinion ready made for a penny, or even a halfpenny. After all, it is rather flattering to be reminded that we are taking a hand in that portentous symposium which evolves "the opinion of our readers."

III. What are we striving for in our life of to-day? Are we striving to conquer, or have conquered for us, so much new material to minister to our love of ease and comfort, our passion for sensation, or are we striving to master *ourselves*, striving for that sane, healthy, moderate view of life, without which

no people, however great its past, can hope to get its work done? If so, we need to recall to ourselves the old unpopular duty of self-restraint; we greatly need to be "temperate in all things." All this glare of publicity, this whirl of extravagant and evanescent feeling in which we live, can only be met and counteracted in one way, and that is by a steady, persistent concentration of the inward life. Even in our religion, one must fear, there is a painful lack of seriousness. Everything must be ordered to please us. The quiet, significant symbolism of the Church's round of Fast and Festival is a discipline we cannot stand, unless there is some attraction in sermon or music. And while we warm ourselves at the fires of religious controversy, we shrink from entering with our Master into the place of Judgment, which is the secret tribunal of our lives.

But this is no time when the Christian can afford to neglect his own soul. If the temptation of our time is to extravagance—a vague wandering up and down in the bright and easy places of life, eagerly searching something new—then we must meet it with its appropriate discipline. A patient recollectedness, a simple concentration of our powers in prayer, in meditation, in contemplation of the all holy Person of our Lord and Master. "If thou desirest true contrition of heart," wrote Thomas à Kempis, "enter into thy secret chamber and shut out the tumults

of the world. In thy chamber thou shalt find what abroad thou shalt too often lose. . . . The more thou visitest thy chamber, the more thou wilt like it; the less thou comest thereunto the more thou wilt loathe it. . . . In silence and in stillness a religious soul advantageth herself, and learneth the mysteries of Holy Scripture."

How we grow unable to commune silently and seriously with our own souls, because the discipline of solitude, when it was offered for our acceptance, seemed to be an impossibly repugnant thing in these extravagant days. Perhaps the thing we most need to learn is the harm we do to ourselves by the dissipation of thought. All the best and noblest characters in history have agreed in one thing, which is that only by recognizing the need of living by some sort of rule can a man put forth his best powers.

["If thou shalt find anything in this mortal life better than righteousness, than truth, temperance, fortitude, apply thyself unto it with thy whole heart, and that which is best, wheresoever thou dost find it, enjoy freely. If thou shalt find that all other things in comparison of this are but vile, and of little moment, then give not way to any other thing. Do thou therefore, I say, absolutely and freely, make choice of that which is best, and stick to it."] Marcus Aurelius

These are the meditations of that great Pagan

that unconscious Christian, Marcus Aurelius. The language is different, but the idea is strikingly like St. Paul's. "To make choice of that which is best," is not that to be temperate in all things, and is not that just what we need to learn?—the deliberate scrutiny and selection of the materials of life, the restraint of exclusion, keeping out some, checking others, that we may not be engrossed in any; but may grow up in a holy, a *whole* life, to the glory of God, which is our incorruptible crown.

Sermon XII.

DUTY.

ST. MATT. IX. 5, 6.

“For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then said He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”



HIS apparently innocent question went down to the root of the matter. It touched the conscientious objector in the very quick of his convictions. Religion, for the man of that day, was a sort of middle term in life, lying midway between character and conduct, having no real connection with either. Apparently it was an imposing force; actually it was a splendid failure, for, content in the security of its mitred mediocrity, it had no aim beyond itself; it led nowhere, it was its own ultimate. Rich in its associations, venerable in its traditions, holy with the sacred burden of the

prayers and praises of countless generations, yet on the side of character it was little more than a historic sentiment, touching a man's imagination perhaps here and there, but rarely kindling his soul. On the side of conduct, no doubt, it was more in evidence, but in its over-elaboration of detail in the finical intricacy of its code, it was rather the curious work of art of some debased period than a living witness to the sacredness of duty. It captured, but failed to transform a man's life, and if in one moment of tender piety it seemed to invite the spirit's ascent, it was only, in the next, to stifle aspiration with some gorgeous rag of custom.

To men reared in such an atmosphere, to the vigorous upholders of a system they claimed to interpret without trying to understand, it was almost indecent to have religion exhibited in this open, naked light, thus unsystematically brought to bear on a real living issue. It was easy enough, doubtless, to talk of forgiving sins, but it was scandalous to hear, utterly irreligious in intent, as they understood religion. To talk of giving power to the paralytic's withered limbs was foolhardy or courageous, as the result might show; but even if he succeeded it would prove nothing, for Beelzebub doubtless looked after his own.

These men, these murmuring scribes, were the typical sceptics of a too confident religion. They

were in slavery to an idea while exhibiting their fetters with pride. They had no response to make to Jesus, for they did not understand the significance of His question. Never could it have been theirs to know Christ, as Browning says, "by the direct glance of the soul's seeing, as the eye sees light." They could only recognize God when He was properly introduced. To bring Him thus openly on to the arena of life without form or ceremony, to exhibit His Providence as influencing the whole personality of man in a vital union of body and soul, was to them a thing abhorrent, utterly irreligious. They never imagined that their religion was hopelessly devitalised because it failed to accomplish that which must be the first care of all religions—to connect the service of God with the service of man.

There is always this tendency to devitalise religion; as with them where creed degenerates into one or two narrow channels, or as with us where practice is evolved out of sentiment, and mentally unanchored to any sound philosophy of religion. It is certainly visible now. Men show an extraordinary infatuation on this one topic. Wise on other points, they are apt to lose their heads the moment they begin to talk of religion. "It is one of the sturdiest prejudices in the public mind, that religion is something by itself, a department distinct from all other

experiences, and to which the tests and judgments men are ready enough to show on other things do not apply." Only as we go back to our great Original, and study afresh in the school of discipleship, do we come to know what a mistake this is, and learn how to correct it. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His own Person declared the universality of religion, and asserted for all time its vital connexion with life. Religious judgment is but the ordinary judgment deepened by wider experiences ; religious sense is but the common sense inspired by a truer, subtler instinct. Men do not need to embarrass themselves by inventing a new process of thinking for religious subjects, for indeed there is no such thing ; all subjects are religious subjects.

In all His teaching our Lord reiterates this one thing, that religion, which is unprovable by itself, can yet be proved ; that the thing apprehended, embraced, loved, the faith, the creed—the relation which the soul believes to exist between itself and God—is proved by its influence on the life. And it is this truth which is implicit in the healing of the paralytic. Strangely as it seems, though less strangely to us than to the murmuring scribes, our Lord addresses Himself first to the man's *spiritual* state. The psychology of Jesus, if we may reverently venture to put it so, had nothing to learn from the schools. He knew, with a most sure complete-

ness, what we are only beginning to learn, that if mind and body react on one another, spirit acts, and is reacted on, by both, that the distinguishable elements in the complex unity of man's personality are so rather in theory than in fact.

"There are two forces in nature," says Emerson, "by whose antagonism we exist: the power of Fate, Fortune, the laws of the world, the order of things, or however else we choose to phrase it, the material necessities on the one hand, and Will or Duty or Freedom on the other." But these two phases of life are antagonistic only in appearance, actually they are resolved into unity in a human personality—a unity that becomes apparent every time a man exerts his will on nature, every time, let us say, when by raising his hand, he performs a daily miracle in overcoming the law of gravity.

And so if the paralytic seemed hopelessly in the grasp of the material order of things, it was because the spiritual had yielded its authority. Somewhere, at some time, in this man's life-history, either by his own default, or that of his forbears, sin had appeared—sin, that is, *positively* a dereliction, a slighting of Duty—and Duty denied, Freedom scorned, Will disenthroned, quickly accomplish a counter-revolution. Here he lies, bound in the invisible bonds of sickness, a dependent on the world's bounty for the very necessities of existence; his life

taken out of his own hands, shaped by other wills, a life deprived of the natural dignity of man, because a life without duties. To be fit for Duty, to be ready to take his place in life, he must be free, morally as well as physically, and he was yet in bond to sin, whose effects are permanent until overcome by a reverent homage to the will of God, which alone gives real freedom.

It may not be always that pain, sickness and disease are the direct penalties of sin. The great religious poem of Job was written to disprove that too easy theory;¹ but undoubtedly they operate by some subtle law of suggestion, as the silent finger of God, pointing out to us that which our inward court of justice forbodes. Instinctively, though the loving mercy of friends will not have it so, we connect the sufferings and infirmities of sickness with past misdoings, and who shall say that our instinct is not a right one? If it be not so experience lies, which teaches that the body's loss is often the soul's opportunity, that in the wakefulness of the sick bed the slumbering moral sense stirs again. It may well have been so with this paralytic, for he at least does not murmur when the Divine Physician exercises on him the fulness of His merciful art, and seems to know it is nothing unnatural or incongruous that it should be said to him, "Son, be of good cheer; thy

¹ In *Relief of Doubt* (Welsh), p. 105.

sins be forgiven thee," ere he is free to "arise and walk."

II. "Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk." There is no doubt, thinks the bystander of to-day who hears these words—murmuring, too, for another reason—there is no doubt which is easier to say, and that is why the Church keeps on saying it. "The Church continues to dole out her antiquated jargon of sin, salvation, redemption, faith, humility, responsibility to God, but all the time," he thinks, "she gives me no reason that I can understand to believe that these things have any unnecessary connexion with arising and walking in the world as it is. Other voices, voices that I *can* understand—voices that speak in the idiom of to-day, voices of pleasure, excitement, sport, business, these call on me to be up and doing, and I arise and walk in the new well-lit paths. Here I am, I enjoy life, I do as much work as I need. I admit that I do not bother myself about Religion; how am I the worse without it? The Church continues to deal in unproveable assumptions. I prefer to live my life among tangible realities." There it is, the feeling which Church Congresses deplore, though they are not unanimous as to what it should be called; as I should venture to put it in plain words, the feeling of the average man, that he has *outgrown* Religion.

Well, in my view, the Church, because she is Divine and eternal, has no need to safeguard her heritage of truth by a timid and obstinate conservatism of phrase, and I will readily grant that unless she sets herself to minister to the sentiment of the age, for that age at all events, she will cease to exist. But although she may alter and modernise some of her methods of delivery, she may not, without grievous unfaithfulness to her mission, subtract one jot from all the grand and simple lessons of the past, but rather reiterate again and again with all the wealth of new illustration which modern life affords, the claims of God—Father, Creator, and Judge—over the lives of men. For while we have, no doubt, many reasons to congratulate ourselves on the fair appearance of modern life, on one point, and that a vital one, the self-complacent indifference to Religion fails to justify itself. If we no longer take our pleasures sadly, we are less inclined, if capable observers are to be believed, to do our duty thoroughly.

A prominent preacher has just got himself into some trouble by a rather wholesale denunciation of the vice, the laziness, the unconscientious performance of the working classes, and though in it there may well have been some rhetorical exaggeration due to the pulpit habit of mind, the reports of employers of labour, the tendency of Trades Union

instructions, and the experience of organizers of Charitable Labour Bureaux, combine to lead one to believe that there is a disquieting modicum of truth in the indictment.

But we need not single out one class. In all classes people are rather looking to pleasure than to duty as the real justification of life. In the Legislature it is often difficult to carry on the government of the country because of the sparse attendance of members, while even schoolmasters tell us of wild ideas of school holidays formed in recent times, on the plea that boys' brains require rest, a plea which nobody really believes, certainly not the boys themselves. Every hour puts the individual in a position where his wishes aim at something which the sentiment of duty should forbid him to seek. Modern life abounds with invitation to those wishes, affords abundant scope for those aims, and so many of us are gradually allowing ourselves to drift into the belief that pleasure and happiness are the same thing. But if we are true to ourselves, we know that there is no pleasure on earth comparable to the sense of duty well done, no unhappiness equal to the miserable knowledge that duty has been shirked.

"Life is hardly respectable, is it?" to quote Emerson again, "if it has no generous, guaranteeing task, no duties or affections that constitute a neces-

sity of existing. Every man's task is his life-preserver. The conviction that his work is dear to God, and cannot be spared, preserves him. . . . A high aim reacts on the means, on the days, on the organs of the body. A high aim is curative as well as arnica." On looking back half a century to the testimony of foreign observers as to the characteristic traits of English life, one finds that the impression they received of it was its thoroughness. Would they say that of us now?

And if it be true that a sense of Duty is waning among us, what is the cause? Duty is not born of self-interest or nourished on expediency, it is a moral sense, and is expressed in the conviction that the real object of life is not necessarily happiness, but education of the will. It resides in the sense of responsibility to something higher than ourselves. Fundamentally it must reside in the sense of responsibility to God. This is the dearest privilege, the supremest dignity of the human will, to rise to conditions of its highest service, and rest content in the performance of its allotted tasks.

This feeling, then, that we have outgrown Religion, reacts, must react, most unfavourably on our common sense of duty. I know, of course, that to some extent it may be due to the idea that Science has impaired the credibility of Religion, that the reign of law leaves no place for the intervention of

a Higher Power. One gets a little tired of that sort of objection nowadays, this constant cry of blasphemy against the dignity of Natural Law. Granted that our observation of as much of the Universe as we know anything about, furnishes us with unbroken sequences of cause and effect which we call laws. These laws are nothing in themselves, they create nothing, they originate nothing, only, as convenient means of assuring us that the Universe is intelligible, do they point to the immanence in Nature of a Supreme Mind behind themselves. So long as men cheat themselves with this talk of supreme laws, so long may they well feel that they are responsible to no one but themselves. Not until they learn to look again into the ways of the Supreme Mind behind them, so significantly expressed in their harmonious working, will they ever recover the sense of duty. "There are two beliefs not inconsistent," said Sir Oliver Lodge, in an address on Science and Christianity, "namely, irrefragable law and spiritual guidance, and men should feel their way to accepting both."

If we are to arise and walk, and manfully fulfil our destiny in the world, rising from the paralysis of neurotic excitements and overstrained pleasures, we may never forget that first we have sins to be forgiven, and that still "the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins."


“Yet on the nimbler air benign
Speed nimbler messages,
That waft the breath of grace divine
To hearts in sloth and ease.
So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, thou *must*,
The youth replies, I *can*.”

Sermon XIII.

HOPE.

I PETER I. 3.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

T is not surprising to find that in the very foreground of his Epistle St. Peter places the brilliant magnetic figure of Hope. It was natural that he should do so, for as we all know the Apostle was a man of sanguine temperament. In the internal economy of the little company, in its relations with its Head; in its judgments, its acceptances, its rejections, he had had rare opportunities of exhibiting both its qualities and its defects. For no one can read the Gospels impartially and not admit that, at all events in its germinating period on Galilean soil, St. Peter was the leader of the Church. The history of the Twelve is, to a remarkable degree, the history of the temperament

of St. Peter. Its qualities appeared in the lively venturesomeness of his faith; in a sort of practical idealism which seemed to discover the end in the beginning, and who was ready to stake all on a happy guess. In the power of his deep attachment to a cause, in the Person of Him Who represented it; in the quick play and ready responsiveness of his emotional life; and, most valuable quality in the circumstances, in the cheerful enthusiasm which was instant to grasp the favourable possibilities of a situation. Undoubtedly, too, he had the characteristic courage of the sanguine, a courage that, in face of a real emergency, could scale the sublime heights of pathos, or flounder in the shallow depths of bathos.

But if he had those qualities, qualities which diffused through all the company by the force of a vigorous personality doubtless acted as a sort of moral and spiritual cement—He Who knew what was in men did not name him Peter the Rock for nothing—yet he suffered from its inevitable defects.¹ You know the sanguine temperament. It is sympathetic, sensitive to outward impressions, easily moved, ready to respond to that which is most attractive in its surroundings, it tends to an easy optimism; it makes the most of what is; it comforts itself with favourable selections. But—and St. Peter did not

¹ v. Mind of St. Peter. Bp. Creighton.

escape the rule—it finds in things more than is in them, it reads its own wishes into everything that approaches, and consequently is prone to the chills of reaction. It is happily fertile in schemes, but somewhat obstinate to its adherence to them. It errs from self-reliance, and blunders from excess of courage.

But the Peter of the Epistle is no longer the Peter of the Gospels. There is the same temperament, but chastened, calmed, steadied. There is the old fire, but it burns with a clearer, steadier flame. You remember the story of the poor woman who importuned King Philip of Macedon to grant her justice, which Philip refused. The woman exclaimed, "I appeal!" The King, astonished, asked to whom she appealed. The woman replied, "From Philip drunk to Philip sober!" It is only by a supposed necessity, which he accepts through mental short-sightedness, that any man is bound by the fetters of his own character. "Unwillingly," says Plato, "the soul is deprived of truth."

To all of us, at some time or another, life makes an appeal to distinguish between what we have been and what we might be. The soul responds, if only for a moment, and lets no man go without some visitation and holy days of a diviner meaning. So it was with St. Peter. To him, intoxicated with the headiness of his own temperament, elated to rash-

ness by the wine of his own hopefulness, life had made a grand appeal. His soul responded : it did not merely *lend* itself, it *gave* itself in steady faithfulness to interpret the divine visitation. As he writes to strengthen the brethren, it is as a man delivered from the bondage of his own mind, secure in his self-possession ; confident still, but calmly confident, because he is sure that vision will no longer run away with judgment.

You know what it was which made all this different to St. Peter ; you know the way in which life made its grand appeal to him. It was in the Resurrection. It was natural it should be so, for the Resurrection marked the great crisis of his individual life. His impetuosity led him to confusion in the moment of trial, and he failed. To him the risen Lord brought the assurance of a new life, founded, not on wayward fallible judgments, but on eternal truth.

And now he sees clearly. He dwells no longer amid the sudden changing lights and deep contrasting shadows which his own temperament cast athwart the path of life. His living hope passes beyond the shadows to the substance within the veil. There is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven." There it is, secure, kept for us : such a different inheritance from that of his eager dreams, full of kaleido-

scopic pictures of the restoration of Israel, but how much more transcendent—an inheritance which infirmities cannot rob, treason cannot imperil. ¹ “Few phrases in literature tell us of a more profound appreciation of the joys of life and what it can give than does the phrase “inheritance pure, undefiled, and unfading.” It defines by negatives and explains by contrasts. Are things fair? Alas! they are subject to corruption. Are things delicate? Alas! how easily they are stained! Are things fresh and blooming? Alas! they fade. The joys, the impressions, the charms of nature and life alike end in disappointment, which may easily turn to despair. Hope cannot sustain itself from what is given without . . . “begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you.” This is St. Peter’s answer to the inevitable disenchantments of life. All that is fair, all that attracts, all that interests and enthralls has its abiding meaning as pointing to an inheritance where corruption, stain, and change are not. The existence of all these in the world, so far from robbing us of hope, only add to its vitality. We can only appreciate visible beauty, we can only receive outward impressions, because through manifold im-

¹ Ibid, p. 6.

perfection we pursue the traces of that which is eternal."

So to St. Peter the Resurrection is everything. He no longer lives in his own plans, pursuing his own expectations, and turning everything that happens into a facile agreement with his own preconceptions, but he sees before him the eternal purpose of God. His own life rises again with Christ from the tomb of its despair—but not only that. The Resurrection is a visible fact; the perennial source of a spring of hopefulness for mankind in the new life of the baptized. He sees a new race of men rise with Christ as he has, quickened together with Him as His redeemed offspring. "Begotten again unto a lively hope," they may face the actual problems of the world.

II. How do we face these problems to-day? Surely not less real or insistent than they appeared to the Apostle. Does the quality of the life around us exhale the atmosphere of hopefulness, or does the smoke of its sacrifice ascend to Heaven in the thin spiral of a sour cynicism, which is convinced that things can never be much better than they are? I think we may say for our comfort that on the whole the thought of the time is alive with hopefulness.

We are not hopeful perhaps in the sense that St. Peter was hopeful; for he grounded his hope on

one great fact in history, which had entered into human life and taken possession of it, and would in time, he was convinced, transform it. We, on the other hand, seem to be growing less inclined to place our confidence in any one fact in any one period of history, handed down to us from whatever sacred avenues of knowledge; but rather in the relation of fact to fact all over the page of human records, issuing, as we think, in a unifying stream of tendency making for righteousness. If men seem now less confident than St. Peter as to the significance of Christ's Resurrection, they appear to be none the less sure that some such power *is* gradually taking hold of humanity, as the Apostle knew would issue from his great experience. If men are, for the moment, less decided as to the means of their begetting, yet, speaking in the broadest sense, they *do* feel that somehow, at some time, *they have* been "begotten again unto a lively hope."

For what is hope? Hope is expectation. The intuition of progress; the sense that things are moving; the eager watchfulness for new combinations, the certainty that something will come of them. These are exactly the notes of the time. Hope is always rather breathless; for the air that it breathes to-day is always a little more rarefied than the air that it breathed yesterday. We remark this quality of breathlessness in the current modes of

thought and action. If we do not yet know how to understand life, we have at least learned to expect much from it. If we are not strong in the power of interpretation—which is faith—we are at least strong in the power of expectation—which is hope.

We are to-day as far as possible free from that pitiless conservatism which destroyed what it conserved by crystallizing it, instead of keeping it just on the edge of saturation. There is no truth, no tradition, no august heritage of knowledge, which we hope to secure from decay by interning it in some air-exhausted receiver. There was a time, not so long ago, when it was deemed respectable to have settled opinions on all important subjects. As you read the past you saw history as a row of empty *culs de sac*. As you read the present you saw our own generation engaged in blocking them up. So there grew up about your mind a high wall, behind which you decorously rejoiced in the thought that none could disturb your mental privacy.

Science has taught us much. Certainly we, whose privilege it is to teach the Gospel, and learn in teaching, owe it many debts of gratitude. But science has taught us nothing more important than this, that "in nature every moment is new: the past is always swallowed up . . . the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath

or covenant to secure it against a higher love, no truth so sublime but it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled: only so far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."

And so we expect much. We are gradually removing, one by one, the limits which superstition or a perverted self-respect set to the possible extensions of knowledge. Whole areas of life are coming under critical observation. Men are turning, for example, with fresh hope to the study of such old problems as are involved in human personality and self-consciousness. The researches of such men as Myers and Gurney are now accepted as serious contributions to knowledge, while even men of science in the more technical sense of the term are beginning to interest themselves in experimental psychology. Everywhere we are surveying the complex pattern of life with eyes of hope. If there is a crooked line here, a blur there, some disarray elsewhere, we refuse to admit, as an older school of social thought was too prone to admit, that so it must needs be. It wants some readjustment, we say, and we proceed to experiment until we have found the right one.

The poor, of course, we expect to have always with us; but we are nurturing a new hope that even the pauper may become a self-respecting citizen, and by labour colonies and model farms we are trying

to justify it. The rich we have always with us too ; but our hope is that by a stringent administration of the death duties, an automatic rise in the rates, and a severe reform of the public services, something may be made even of the rich.

Yes, we are sanguine in these days, and maybe we need some little warning about the defects of our quality. We have to remember that whatever the reform whose fame now fills the land—whether temperance or the better housing of the poor, or a broader basis of education, or a reform of the land laws, or the arrest of physical decay, or a more careful regulation of youthful labour, or a lowering of the haughty sacerdotal pride of the Church of England—however fair and generous each may appear, they are poor and bitter things when prosecuted for themselves as an end. No reform ever did what was expected of it—no reform ever will. Every reform, in proportion to its energy, begets disgust. Action and reaction interchange just as inexorably in the domain of ethics and sociology as in the human body, and a state of hopefulness is always liable to be succeeded by a state of general distrust. Hope is apt to cheat itself in becoming articulate: it cannot sustain itself upon what is given from without. “The soul of society is more important than its body, and the soul can be appeased not by a deed but by a tendency.” It is in a hope maturing,

rather than in a hope which believes itself satisfied, that she feels her wings.

III. And if it is thus in a spirit of hopefulness that we face the general problems of life, how shall we face those special problems connected with that particular aspect of life which we call religion? Surely with no less hopefulness. We may point to many signs here and there which seem to be discouraging; but this we know, that faith and hope go hand in hand, and where hope is, faith, though for the moment it keep in the background, cannot be far off. Men will not always be content to entertain a general hope in the progress of mankind without being able to assign to it any definite foundation in fact. Gradually they must come to learn, out of their very sanguineness for man, that the power of expectation, which is hope, must, in the last resort, wait on the power of interpretation, which is faith. For faith in referring hope back to a Divine Person gives it a living atmosphere: faith interprets hope in terms, not of fragmentary human endeavour, but of an eternal purpose. Faith cures hope of its disenchantments, its chagrins, its sicknesses, by an assurance of an ultimate inheritance, pure, undefiled, and unfading.

What if our conception of that heavenly inheritance be less vivid than St. Peter's; what if its outlines appear less defined than to him; what if faith

be less settled, perhaps it only qualifies the better as a handmaid of hope. For hope, in Emerson's exquisite phrase, "never spreads her golden wings but on unfathomable seas."

Everywhere men are beginning to feel the need of this interpretive power which they have not yet learned to recognize in faith. Even science itself is becoming a little discontented with the splendid isolation of its own particular platform, and is looking about for congenial alliances. I read recently in a note on scientific training, "The result of the present method is to turn out hodmen of science. Set them down on a stool in a laboratory, with a given piece of work to do, and they will do it well. They will ascertain the facts; but their mere hodmanship is apparent when they are asked for an interpretation. Yet the relation of dead facts to interpreted facts is that of a heap of stones to a Gothic Minster. A scientific fact is a related fact, an interpreted fact. All facts are part of science, in so far as they are related or interpreted. The power, consciously and patiently, to undertake a series of measurements or analyses—probably suggested by someone else—if unaccompanied by some grasp of logic and *significance*, constitutes a man not an architect but a bricklayer."

I do not know who is the author of these remarks, or what his standing, and I may be mistaken in the

extent of their significance, but they seem to me to constitute a most important admission. They appear to mean that the method of sense perception as an end in itself is misleading : that it can settle nothing, deny nothing, affirm nothing ; that unrelated to philosophy it is a sterile fragment of knowledge. Thus, by implication, they overthrow that too confident naturalism which formerly claimed to have turned the postulates of religion inside out. If science once seeks philosophy as an ally, she may end in claiming religion as a friend : for the transition from philosophy to metaphysics, and from metaphysics to religion, is by no means difficult or unnatural. Faith at least cannot appear bankrupt to science, if, with the confidence born of unceasing experiment, she can point to One in Whom all facts are related, in Whom all facts find their completest interpretation—the Divine Fulfiller, Who in Himself sums up all things, “whether things in Heaven, or things in the earth, or things under the earth.”

IV. And if we can thus face the problems of religion on their intellectual side with a reverent hopefulness, need we be less hopeful about those same problems on their spiritual, personal side? I think not. Here again there are many disquieting facts. Undoubtedly there is a general slackening of religious interest, a spiritual apathy and inattention which are deplorably evident. To-day, as long ago

on Calvary, it is only the few who gather round the Cross with any intention of personal loyalty. Yet an undying influence was transmitted through those few to the multitude, and what a few could do then a few can do to-day.

If we cannot have quantity, may we not at least have quality? There is a large loose mass of ethico-religious sentiment which is honest enough so far as it goes: its fault is that while it occupies itself with the results of Christianity, and professes itself extremely hopeful about them, it does not connect those results with a living Christ. St. Peter yielded to no man in the strength of his hope of what Christianity may do for the world, but the fact "that we are begotten again unto a lively hope" only became apparent to him through his intimate knowledge of the Living Person and mind of His Lord and Master. May we not look for our renaissance of spiritual attention in the ability of the few to teach the many that the true basis of Christianity is and must be, not its apparent concurrence with any passing phase of thought and feeling, but the effect produced upon the heart and conscience by the Gospel picture of Christ's life, teaching, and personality. As we come to understand *Him* the better, yield to Him more and more of our love and homage, we become by so much the more independent of theories about Him Whose demolition disturbs a feebler devotion.

Men can lead themselves in hope; but they want leaders in the Faith, leaders not so much amongst the clergy, who are regarded, and perhaps too often regard themselves, as a class apart, but leaders amongst those whom they meet in the common life of business and society.

May not you be such leaders; you who have begun, perhaps, in some degree, to learn how to make the crooked straight, and the rough places plain? Is not this the rôle which the circumstances of the time would seem to assign to what are called educated congregations! If you are conscious that the Spirit of God has led you into some fuller conception and higher grasp of truth than once you had, why, then, you hold that precious possession in trust for your brethren. St. Peter was a leader among the Twelve before all things because he was full of hope. Hope is essentially the quality of the leader, and I believe that there are plenty of women, aye, and of men, whom God has educated as leaders in the faith because they are full of religious hope, because they are willing to spend themselves in knowing and loving their Lord with a more intimate knowledge, a more personal fervour.

Go out, then, this Advent—surely the most tenderly hopeful of all the Church's seasons—and lead. Go out and show others, if you can and will, that you give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, because He has begotten you again unto a lively hope. You will find the task hard, full of checks, disappointments, discouragements, but if God has given it into your hand you may not lay it down.


"The Archangel Hope
Looks to the azure cope,
Waits through dark ages for the morn,
Defeated day by day, but unto victory born."

Sermon XIV.

DIVES AND LAZARUS.

ST. LUKE XVI. 26.

"And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

 HIS is one of those parables of which the essential truth lies below the surface of the story. It is set forth with an unusual wealth of detail, framed in a strikingly dramatic setting, but unless we are careful to bear in mind certain necessary conditions of interpretation, we may find the detail confusing, the framework misleading, and shall be in some danger of being led to a wrong conclusion.

And to begin with—though this is a condition which applies to all the parables, if especially to this one—we must remember that our Lord, Who spoke it, was a man. Perhaps it is not too much to say that while the fact itself is of course accepted as an article of our faith, all that is involved and

implied in our Lord's humanity is either ignored or overlaid. It is supposed, wrongly supposed, I believe, that any accent or emphasis laid on the meaning of His human nature tends to obscure the full truth of His divinity, and endanger His claim to be the Saviour of mankind. I believe this view to be a superficial one. For although we may readily admit that at no period of the world's moral and intellectual development was it more necessary to keep in sight the fact that it was the Eternal Word that was made flesh in Jesus than it is to-day ; yet we must assert with equal emphasis that the real truth about the divinity of Jesus Christ can only be made plain when it is complemented by the real truth about His humanity.

What is it then to be a man?—for whatever it is, it must be as true of Jesus Christ as it is of any of us. We can only answer that to be a man is to possess a human personality, coloured by temperament, conditioned, and to some extent, limited, by environment. To speak the truth as a man is to speak it as it comes to you filtered by the atmosphere of nationality, and the circumstances of the time in which you live. Apart from these conditions we cannot conceive of anyone existing as a man in any real sense of the word, and it only increases our reverence for the mysterious condescension of the Incarnation to realize that in hiding His glory under

a veil of flesh, the Eternal Son of God subjected Himself to the mental and moral, as well as the physical restrictions, which the fact of humanity imposes.

To realize inwardly, and at least privately to distinguish the essential and eternal elements of the Gospel story from those that are only local and temporary, is a hard task, to be approached only with true humility and a reverent caution. But it is a task which lies before us, destined, if God will, to call out our latent powers of spiritual perception, and lead us up to a higher stage of Christian education.

Now in this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus we find that it is the local and national elements which in the detail and setting of the story are given the most prominent place, while the essential truth which it teaches is not bound up with, or dependent on these, but detaches itself to find a perpetual application beyond their limited horizon. The duty of the rich to the poor, for example, on which it obviously insists, is not by any means the whole, or even the principal object of the parable. It was a lesson doubtless always needed, and by a dramatic contrast between the circumstances of Dives and Lazarus, our Lord clearly intended to stimulate the imagination of His audience and prepare the way for its reception. But it was, in the

first place, a lesson of particular and local application.

We do not know very much of the social conditions of the time amongst the Jews, but what we do know makes it plain that the leaders of religious opinion were so occupied in striving after a technical and ceremonial righteousness that they greatly neglected those principles of human conduct of which the law of Moses was full. Remember that we are in the East, where beggary was accorded, and still is accorded, a position of much greater license and acknowledgment than in the West. The scene which our Lord here depicts must have been no uncommon one in the Jerusalem of His day. But while the state of things which made it possible was accepted as a matter of course, He felt it to be a scandal and a disgrace to religion as taught and professed. We shall go very wrong if we allow ourselves to suppose that He intended to set the poor against or above the rich. Jesus Christ was no social revolutionary ; He desired to direct the attention of both rich and poor to the things that mattered. When we remember how He told His disciples that "unless their righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," and when we find that Pharisees were among His audience, it is obvious that the point of the parable in its social aspect is

a stern intimation to them that they were responsible for the neglect of "judgment and mercy," the weightier matters of the law. And yet further; when our Lord carries the development of His story into the conditions of a future state of being, as a Jew addressing Jews, He gives us a picture which corresponded, in the main, with orthodox Jewish ideas of the life to come. We ought to be on our guard against the idea that because, in speaking of Hades and Abraham's bosom, our Lord makes use of the current ideas of His time, He intended them to have a precise and literal value, or as anything more than shadows of the truth. He never claimed to unveil the secrets of life and eternity, but, on the contrary, always maintained that He only spoke what was told Him by the Father.

But the real interest of the parable does not lie in these external features. Jesus did not speak either as a social reformer or a dogmatic theologian; He never attempted, on the one hand, to upset the structure of society as He found it, nor, on the other, did He banish the real interests of religion to a vague and misty hereafter. He spoke as One Who, "knowing what was in man," had a profound and sympathetic knowledge of human nature, Who, knowing its true interests, could construe the riddle of its infirmities and forecast the track of its tendencies.

He saw around Him a society devoted to religion, given over to its interests, punctual in the performance of meticulous duty, and yet a society almost without real faith. He wished to bring it to the knowledge of its true state. Scribes, Pharisees, Priests, were as rich in the glories of manufactured righteousness, in the fineness of dogmatic accuracy, as ever Dives was in his purple and fine linen. They fed as scrupulously on popular approval as ever he on rich meats and wines, and their real case was just the same as his. The rich man in the parable neglected the poor beggar, and disregarded his wants, solely because he was a hard, worldly man, who took a material view of life. He had no faith, he believed in nothing but himself; and he felt that his riches justified him in that belief. For the purposes of practical religion he may have professed a belief in God, but he had no faith in that large spiritual view of life which sees it only as part of some great polity in which all alike, rich and poor, subject to the common discipline of life, are bound together in one essential unity, instruments of some great purpose hid in the counsels of God. He had no belief in that inner view of life, in which it is seen to reveal, little by little in all its vicissitudes, something of the ways of God. He had no wish to learn those ways. He did not believe, probably, that there was anything to learn. He was content with life

as he found it. He had nothing of that faithful temper which searches everywhere for traces of God's work, in nature, in Holy Writ, in the lives of men, and is not content till it find Him. He did not love to have God in his life, and so he had no love for man in his heart. Had his belief in God been anything but rudimentary, he could not so completely have ignored another's needs. In his attitude he had the tacit approval of the official religious teachers. Religion, our Lord showed, is beset with an evil tendency to ignore the larger aspects of truth and concentrate its powers on non-essentials. This was one great lesson of the parable—that religious orthodoxy, not for the first time nor yet for the last, was its own worst enemy.

II. And here we seem to find ourselves at the heart of the matter. Of Lazarus we are told nothing save the deadly discomfort of his life; but we may be sure that it was not his poverty alone which qualified him for Abraham's bosom. The outward gulf which separated his dire distress and squalid misery from the rich man's ease and glittering refinement, can only have been symbolical of the profounder gulf which separated *his* inward being from that of the other. There is a spiritual view of life, and there is a material view; and between the two there is a great gulf fixed. In the one life finds its larger meanings only in God, for He is everywhere, "in

all, and through all." All the activities of human life are of profound interest. All humanity's strife with itself, with sin, with ignorance, with prejudice ; all its failures as well as its successes ; all the great lessons of its past, all the living monuments of its present, all the half-revealed tendencies of its future. For all in some way or another speak of God, His work, and His will, and all, by many converging lines, draw inwards and upwards to that great unity of which He is the centre. But in the material view life is self-contained ; and all its meaning, if it has any, as all its pleasure, lies in success ; and that depends solely on human activities. If there are large views they are probably illusions ; in any case you must be content to miss them, for to be successful you must concentrate yourself ; you cannot afford to be speculative or even too sympathetic, for there is no sympathy in business. The end of life is, after all, yourself, and what others may do, or not do, is their own affair.

It does not need any great discernment to see that between one habit of thought and the other there is a great gulf fixed, and on the one side or other of it all of us, by some necessity in which will and choice are really involved, take up our stand. And it is this great gulf, rather than any social divisions, which in reality divides human beings and keeps them from one another ; and per-

haps, who knows, by an automatic development of character, will sunder them to all eternity. One of the lessons of the parable at least we have learnt. If the West has discovered why it is a cruel kindness to take the parable literally and encourage the casual beggar of the East, certainly the poor man at the gate no longer goes on his dismal way disregarded and ignored.

Surprising floods of money are, year by year, poured into the ever-swelling sponge of poverty and want ; and yet it is not filled, nor ever will be. Hospitals, infirmaries, schools, libraries, institutions and agencies religious and secular, public and private charities by the thousand, are all his for comfort and relief. Oh, no! Lazarus, when he is honest, which sometimes he is not, cannot pretend that he is ignored, neglected, and despised to-day. Dives, if he still clothes himself in purple and fine linen and fares sumptuously, at all events sees to it that his poor neighbour is clad in very decent broad cloth and does not go starving. But the gulf is still there. The poor take all that is given, while hardly realizing that it is a gift, and are certainly not overcome with gratitude. Still they complain of the selfishness of the rich, and while consumed with a smouldering envy of his pleasures, make but the smallest attempt to understand the responsibilities and requirements of a rich man's life. Dives draws

his cheque with considerable freedom and a not unworthy generosity—perhaps, too, he goes down to the East End and organizes a settlement, or starts a social club—but of mutual understanding, mutual esteem, and mutual allowance there is very small show. Lazarus generally dislikes Dives, while half despising and wholly envying him. Dives finds Lazarus a most unaccountable and peculiar fellow. The gulf is fixed, and he is very bold who tries to cross it.

What is the meaning of all this? It is surely the growing consciousness of the ultimate brotherhood of all men, which has really sprung up of that quickened sense of duty which those who have feel towards those who have not. It is the conscious effort to advance another step towards the practical unity of the race which fills the land with these monuments of a liberal charity. And is there not something rather pathetic in the fact that what all the well-meant, if sometimes ill-directed, efforts of peaceful years fail to accomplish, a few anxious days of war should bring about? For a moment in our national life, all too brief, rich and poor, class and mass, panting in the toils of a common adversity, felt themselves drawn together by the necessities of a common danger, to contemplate a profounder interest, and to find a deeper purpose in life than anything individual, sectional, or merely

selfish could supply. That moment is over, and already individuals and classes are flying apart again, under the influence of the normal forces of repulsion ; but surely it lasted long enough for us to read its lesson. Why was it that a great war, and again a great death, gave us, under all our differences, the welcome consciousness of a profound unity? Why, because it set us free from ourselves ; because our vision, sharpened by adversity, could penetrate beyond the fixed stars of our usual horizon into one of the abysses of eternity. Because for a moment life seemed no longer self-contained, but summoned us to look for its meaning in God.

And so between Dives and Lazarus there will always be a great gulf fixed, which no external efforts of charity, understanding, or toleration can ever formally bridge. Only when those great educational forces which lie behind all outward religion, no longer diverted from their proper paths, unite us all in that spiritual view of life which is faith in the Fatherhood of God, can we hope to attain to that inward unity which can safely bridge over all gulfs. For it is only in lives welded together by a common interest in, and a common understanding of, the love of God, that rich and poor can meet together, and acknowledge that the Lord is the Maker of them all.

III. But I do not think that we shall have done

our duty by this parable, or have learnt all our Lord would have taught us, if we leave it there. It is not enough to say that faith in the Fatherhood of God, and all that it implies, can alone unite us in a lasting union. We are met at once by this objection from those who take the material view of life. "You are propounding an impossible condition. I do not believe in God as you understand Him, and I cannot. It may be my misfortune that I have not this faith—it certainly cannot be my fault."

But I think that this parable may have been intended to show us, among other things, that we are more responsible for belief and unbelief than we are disposed to admit. In the last stage of it our Lord, with a sure grasp of spiritual things and the possibilities of the unseen world, takes us beyond the limits of our present experience. He lets us see the rich man, the man of material views, under new conditions of being, and shows us that some measure of enlightenment has come to him. Across the gulf he recognizes at last a higher power, and cries to that power for help. He has begun to think of others. He has five brethren, he says, still on earth, whose ways are as his were. But if one were to go back from the dead, and testify to them, he is convinced that they will repent.

"Repent"—it is a curious and significant phrase under the circumstances. The earlier portion of the

parable gives us not so much as a hint that Dives himself had been living in a state of what used to be called "moral reprobation." So far as we know, he was no law-breaker, no thief, murderer, or adulterer; and the only suggestion about his brethren was that they were so like him, that their future state would be like his. But the word *repent* implies a moral change, an acknowledgment of wrong done, a determination to right it. Used in this connection it can only mean that he had come to realize that his unbelief, his material view of life, was largely his own fault. And that this is so is borne out by the answer to his agonized appeal which our Lord puts in the mouth of Abraham. "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them. If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded"—even *persuaded*, mark you!—"though one rose from the dead."

"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." Is not this true to-day? Superstitious craving is much more easily satisfied than a real hunger for truth; and while it greedily mouths its favourite morsel it thinks it is fed with the very bread of life. With one it is, "I do not believe in prayer, the Bible is out of date, the Sacraments are mere priestcraft; but let one return to me from the dead and play the tambourine, and rap tables, and answer foolish questions, and generally behave

in a futile and undignified way, and I shall believe." With another it is, "Your old-fashioned religion is preached out, and, besides, what does it do for you? Religion ought to be practical. Now I *do* believe in prayer; so you let me pray, and I will mend your broken leg, and then you will believe too." With others less extravagant, if only a little less superstitious, it is, "I dislike your ceremonies, your worship is cold, and your preaching over my head; but give me a rousing mission, with plenty of stirring hymns, and some interested converted sinners, and then I shall believe that the Gospel is still a living force."

The world prides itself on its scepticism, but it is all agape for marvels. But signs and wonders never converted anyone to a belief in things that matter, never even *persuaded* anyone to alter the mental and spiritual habits of a lifetime. It is not so, that belief comes, belief in that wide truth of God that can embrace all life. We too have "Moses and the Prophets." The Word of God, that master Word of inspiration, is still ours, and only yields to patient, unprejudiced study, that "all truth" into which we may yet be led. And if the older prophetic voices that spoke to former ages with authority have no living word for us, are not new prophets arising every day? Science itself is becoming more spiritual, Biology, Chemistry, Astronomy are all pro-

claiming in their own tongues to dwellers in the utmost parts of the earth the wonderful works of God. Geographical and antiquarian discoveries are, year by year, in unexpected ways, confirming the old testimony, "Saul himself is among the prophets."

Has any honest man, to-day, the right to take his unbelief for granted, and refuse, with all these new lights, to study afresh "Moses and the Prophets"? You have only to broach the subject to find how all "with one consent begin to make excuse." But perhaps, when the value of excuses is submitted to the final test, not a few will stand "speechless."

Sermon XV.

ZACCHÆUS.

ST. LUKE XIX. 5.

“And when Jesus came to the place He looked up and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house.”



HIS is one of those delightful human touches of which the Gospels are full ; which in their artless simplicity are yet evidences of a profound art, and by relieving the austerity of its lofty spiritual character, declare that, after all, the Bible is its own best preacher. There is something almost playful in this little story of the man with his physical disability, a kind of incongruousness in juxtaposition with the doings of the Son of Man. And yet it is a playfulness which seems perfectly easy and natural, an incongruousness which does not jar. No one writing the Gospels to-day would dare to write them in this way ; but the Evangelists, full of the Holy Spirit, are exponents of an art such as no lesser inspira-

tion can ever venture on. There is a feeling in all this, common in earlier days, but very strange to us now. The sense of affectionate but reverent familiarity with sacred things, which inspired the old ecclesiastical Miracle Plays of mediæval times, which lingers on in the quaint old carols sung in remote country places, though not in the detestable performance of the London street boy. The spirit which a heavy-footed Protestantism, surely the Policeman of all religions, has driven right away.

Zacchæus, from the nature of his calling—he was a principal farmer of revenue—made his money out of extortion, and (worst offence of all) held office under the Roman government. Zacchæus was not a popular man. Even if he had not been too short to see over the heads of the crowd, he would probably not have felt inclined to thrust himself forward on the public notice. But he wanted to see Jesus, and it was quite evident from what followed that his wish was not prompted by idle curiosity, and so it was very likely prudence, as well as a defect of nature, which made him run ahead of the crowd and seek a place of vantage in the sycamore tree. It was not altogether a dignified thing perhaps for a rich man, high up in the public service, to do, but he happened to be very much in earnest at the moment, and with the determination of a man who does things did not stop to consult his dignity,

but went straight to the point. Zacchæus *must* see Jesus, that was imperative; and if he must needs see Him from the branches of a tree, like a school-boy, it could not be helped.

He did see Jesus—and Jesus saw him. Nothing in human life is too small, or apparently too far removed from the range of His interest, to escape His notice. When He comes opposite to where Zacchæus was watching in the sycamore tree, He stops, and the whole crowd stops with Him. He looks up as if He were greeting a friend, as if it were quite a natural thing for the man to be up there, and He says, “Make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide in thy house.” You see the beautiful, tender courtesy and consideration of it; how children must have loved Him as they love all tender hearts. The man, you see, had put himself about, had laid himself open to misconception, to contumely, possibly to ridicule, to do Jesus honour—for, after all, it is the highest honour which one man can pay another to be eager to see him for his own sake. On the instant our Lord recognizes all this, puts him at his ease with a word, and repays honour with honour by inviting Himself to Zacchæus’s house; for at this time Jesus was the most sought out celebrity in Jerusalem. See the dear, sweet, human character of the Lord, Who did not forget to be genial although He was good.

What a rebuke it is to that exclusive religiousness which divides human life up into separate lots like an auctioneer's plan, which damns a man on account of his calling. If the Lord could see good in an extortionist publican, is it too much to hope that a Methodist might see good in a bookmaker? There was plenty of that kind of aggressive piety abroad in Jerusalem, and there was a strong popular feeling against publicans. There was a grumbling, of course, and shocked dismay—"He is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner!" But our Lord had no sympathy with prejudices of any kind or colour, and He calmly disregarded it all; all the settled conventions and opinions of the pious and the respectable, even of the patriotic, to show kindness and sympathy to a man who was sorely in need of both. To poor Zacchæus, lonely in the midst of his riches, the Lord's condescension was a joyful surprise. It moved him deeply, and in touching his heart, touched his conscience. As he stood before the Lord, the host in his own house, he made a confession, and he made a promise too. He did not promise to give up his calling, to forsake all, and live a life of poverty—that was not what he was fit for, and Jesus did not require it of him. But he undertook that, in future, he would think of others as well as of himself, that he would conduct his business on very different lines; for had he not,

at last, found a good man who would say a good word for him. "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor," that was his thankoffering for a simple act of kindness and generosity; "and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." And what was the Lord's answer? A rebuke, a condemnation of his way of life? No! He did not deal with men that way. He told the man how glad he was that, by his own act, he had put himself right with society in recognizing the claims which society had on him, and, because of his good feeling, reverses the sentence of banishment which society had pronounced. "This day is salvation come to this house forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

II. Now this story seems to me to have applications to modern life which are worth thinking of. First of all, it is a striking and eloquent testimony to the power of Christ; that power which never ceases its silent work in the world, and often shows itself in most unexpected places. Zacchæus was a financier, a man whose life was spent in the operations of the money market; the last man in the world, one would say, to be moved by religious considerations, or indeed any considerations, to part with money for the sake of other people. It was a big thing for the man to do to part with half his goods for the benefit of the poor. You may

say that it would still leave him a rich man, still leave him in an enviable position, though that would be an ungenerous view to take; but still it was a big thing for such a man to do, and he would never have done it if the power of Christ had not entered into his life.

The financier is a not uncommon type, and it cannot be denied that the conditions which produce him are not exactly ideal ones. Nothing tends to make a man so hard, so ruthless; nothing tends to put him so far beyond ordinary human considerations, as to spend his life watching the movements of stocks and shares, influencing the tone of markets, planning great financial combinations. It is not merely that he is rich. Other men may become rich in commerce, in law, in medicine, in journalism; but the fact that what they sell benefits others, at least in some degree, keeps them in touch with the interests of others and alive to their claims. But a man who buys and sells money benefits no one, and need think of no one but himself. Such a man not infrequently cares nothing whatever for the pleasures and amusements of life; he lives plainly, and cares nothing for society. He does not care to spend, he simply cares to make. His nature is in danger of becoming hard and metallic like the substance in which he deals.

Now we often refer with regret and concern, and

quite rightly refer, to the fact that large classes of the community have put themselves outside the pale of religion, ignore its claims, and never practise its rites. It is a painful thing to us who hold very dear the truth as it is in Jesus to see that others, and those among the rich and influential, take no interest in it whatever. And yet it would seem to be faithless to assume that, because Jesus Christ is not always seen to work on men's lives through the recognized channels of grace, He is not at work at all, or has lost His persuasive power. He did not treat all men in the same way when he was on earth, and He does not now. It was said once, I believe, that it is impossible to make £100,000 and remain perfectly honest. That statement may have been true when the legitimate profits of an ordinary trading concern were much less than they are to-day, but it certainly would not hold good now. If, however, we multiply that sum, and say that it is impossible to make a million and remain perfectly honest, in many cases it would probably be true. A millionaire is as much an object of attack as he is of envy. People suspect his honesty; socialists shriek for his downfall; journalists are critical of him; Churches long to reform him. He is very much in the position of Zacchæus of old.

It is then, to my mind, a very significant thing that we have recently had notable instances of

financiers, hard business men, who have parted with a large portion of their goods for the benefit of others. As to the merits of the various schemes by which they hope to fulfil their philanthropic ends there may be differences of opinion. But the fact that, in the midst of their busy lives, walled in by money, assailed by every sort of abuse from people who knew that they must be more virtuous because they are poorer, they should have evolved such schemes at all, seems to be full of hopeful augury.

And if you ask what was the unlikely power which moved those men to do those big things, I say that it was the power of Christ. And if this answer seems to be far-fetched, I reply that if you are a faithful man you cannot deny that the Spirit of Christ is ever at work amongst us since the Day of Pentecost, and that the whole object of His indwelling presence is to coalesce the scattered units of humanity into one society, through the ties of mutual consideration. Nothing less than the Spirit of Christ, acting through the body of society in new ideals and loftier impulses, can have made the modern financier part with his money; just as no one but Christ Himself could have made Zacchæus bestow half his goods on the poor and repay the wrongs he had committed with a fourfold repayment.

I think, indeed, that we who hold the honour of our Lord very dear, who fear, and not unnaturally fear, lest in these days inattention, forgetfulness, self-absorption, and ungratefulness should lead men to be careless of His fame—I think we deprive ourselves of available comfort and assurance by overlooking His power to act on men's lives at a *distance*. Directly you think of it you will see what I mean, for examples of that indefinable power come trooping into memory from the pages of the Gospels.

There is Zacchæus himself, who had never proclaimed a faith in His Messiahship; who had never recognized Him as a prophet; who had seen no mighty work, who had heard no comforting word, who had never been face to face with Him in his life; and yet he is none the less a disciple because he first saw Him between the branches of a tree, rather than in the courts of the Temple. There is Nathaniel, whose heart went out in reverent homage to Him Who had so wonderfully read that heart while yet he was far away under the fig-tree. There is the child, whose anxious father leaves him at death's door on a desperate errand. He implores Jesus to "come down ere his child died"; but He Who never did a needless thing does not go, and yet, ere ever the father returns to prove his trembling hope, his little son is healed. And, still more won-

derful instance than all, there is Pilate's wife, the partner of him who was, perforce, the chief agent of the Lord's enemies ; who, probably, without ever having seen Him, was so illumined by the radiations from that all-conquering personality, was so penetrated with a sense of His absolute goodness and transcendent nobility, that with a tragic intuition, an awful foreboding, she besought her husband to "have nothing to do with that just Person."

Are all these things to go for naught? Surely we must own that our Lord Christ's strange power to act on human souls at a distance is as much a part of the Gospel as that He did mighty works close at hand, or that He instituted the Sacraments, or founded the Church. We see the Sacraments slighted, the Church ignored and flouted, and we grieve and are fearful, lest in refusing the venerable heirlooms of Christendom, which for so long have enshrined His memory and witnessed to His activities, men should altogether refuse *Him*. Men must have Him near them, we say—see Him do a mighty work in the wonderful Sacrament of His love ; hear Him speak the memorable word of forgiveness at the tribunal of penitence ; hear His praises chanted in the accustomed rhythm of Psalm and hymn, or His Name will perish out of the earth. But what are the Sacraments ; what is the

Church itself, but visible pledges of the truth set forth in the story of Zacchæus, and all those others, that though we be far, yet He is near?

We are right indeed to grieve; grieve for our brethren's loss, since to know Him anear is an altogether richer, more wonderful, more enduring experience, than to know Him afar; but never right to be afraid for Him. For though men must miss *much* of the truth in refusing the delight of an intimate discipleship, they can never miss *all* the truth He came to bring. Jesus Christ is not a memory, He is a living force; and though a memory may fade as hearts grow cold, or are kindled at other fires, a force men cannot evade, even if they have to analyze it anew. Of all who have ever speculated on the nature of Christ's power, St. Paul saw most profoundly when he understood Him as He Who "sums up." As the great co-ordinating factor in life, linking together in Himself all its scattered units in one divine synthesis.

And so it is even now. All the best and healthiest movements of the time, all the deep streams of tendency which are bearing men away from primeval selfishness towards a more generous interpretation of life's obligations, all the stirrings of the social conscience which are registered in more considerate legislation; all the far-flung impulses which move the hearts of kings to compassion and create in

every class of their subjects an appetite for active benevolence—all these are summed up in Christ, have Him for their author, Him for their final goal. He came to lead us to the Father, and we cannot know One as a Father of all until we have learned to know ourselves as one in each other. He has humanity well in hand to teach it that lesson, in spite of wars and tumults, or all the signs of the times are for naught. And it is more to Him, if we may say so reverently, that His work should be done than His agency in it recognized. Lead them He must and will: but if men grow impatient of His stretched-out hand when they see it, then, in His loving wisdom, He will withdraw Himself and save them from afar. They shall make their own experiments, learn their own lessons, go their own ways; but they shall find Him at the end of them.

“Cleave the wood and there am I, raise the stone and there thou shalt find Me.” Isaiah knew the faithfulness of God and the perverseness of man when he wrote: “I will bring the blind by a way they know not; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

Sermon XVI.

THE GREAT INTRUDER.

ECCLESIASTICUS XLI. 1, 2, 3.

"O Death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things: yea, unto him that is yet able to receive meat!

O Death, acceptable is thy sentence unto the needy, and unto him whose strength faileth, that is now in the last age, and is vexed with all things, and to him that despaireth, and hath lost patience!

Fear not the sentence of death, remember them that have been before thee, and that come after; for this is the sentence of the Lord over all flesh."



THE sky is native blue, and garnished with the pearly white of towering clouds. The air is soft and odorous, vibrating with the busy hum of invisible life. The breeze makes many-voiced music with Nature's leafy harps. The banks are rich with summer dress of deepest green, jewelled with many a flower, girdled with a silver stream that flows amidst the reflecting glory of the

conquering Sun, as the laughing ripples break into innumerable jewel points of light. It is a river of joy, a river of pleasure, a river of love. Nature wears her holiday dress, the river smiles with holiday face, a passing boat is bright with women's summer dresses, with men's dash of colour in cap or scarf. There is laughter, gaiety, good humour; no anxiety, no apprehension, never a thought of danger; just a few happy people making the most of the golden moment. In careless confidence and sheer light-heartedness someone makes a hasty movement. A lurch—a few gasping, choking cries—a short, frantic, agonizing struggle, and then nothing but a few bubbles—a floating oar—a bright-hued cap. But the river is as smiling, the air as soft, the sun as brilliant when the next boat-load turns the corner. . . .

You stand by the parapet of a great bridge. The murky air, embodied phantom of the city's myriad life, is rank with the emanations of its countless activities, thunderous with the roar of its eager traffic. Beneath stretches the wide river, framed with the gaunt unattractiveness of wharf and warehouse—sullen, heavy, and black is its flood. A river of fate, a river of enterprise, a river of rich interests; the safe accustomed highway of a vast and prosperous business, the willing daily handmaid of this busy city's needs. There is nothing

here of the unknown, the unexpected. It is the every-day domestic life of a vast organism. But the river has its secrets. As you watch, a boat shoots out from the shore with orderly progress. It is stayed in mid-stream. There is a search, an exploration, a kind of questioning of the river's dull face—a quick, sudden movement, and something is drawn forth, a nameless something, which is carefully laid down in the bottom of the boat and hastily rowed back to shore. A moment more and nothing is altered, nothing has happened apparently. A lofty crane swings home its appointed burden of goods, the laden barge slides along its easy way; but the river has given up another of its secrets.

And so the great flood of human life passes through many a diverse scene; bright with laughter and love, tense with strenuous planning and arranging, black with heartache, and disappointment and woe. On its surface are the countless types and individuals that make up the every-day aspect of the human family as we know it in the street, in the station, in the shop; grave and gay, comic and dull, rich and poor, wise and foolish, distinguished and ordinary, washed and unwashed. All, on the surface, so sundered by circumstance, so divided by temperament, that the permutations and combinations of colour and form seem infinite. But beneath the surface, in the unplumbed deeps

of life's river, lies ever a hint, a lurking suggestion, of life's essential limitation, which unites them all in the bond of a common tragedy—the tremendous, mysterious tragedy of Death. . . .

And I suppose that it is just because life is so full, so various, so sparkling in its effects, so rich in its possibilities, that we city dwellers think so little and so seldom of death. In country life—in great open spaces under the wide, unfettered sky, in the simple, natural order of things, one seems closer and more akin to the fundamentals of existence. Here one is surrounded by so much that distracts one's attention. The pressing claims of business, the artifices of pleasure and amusement, a ready and over-liberal supply of news about this, that, or the other; all the clanking, bawling, mechanism of fine-drawn city life tends to keep in the background uncomfortable and inevitable facts. We are too apt to get into that habit of mind which regards every moment of the day as wasted unless we are *doing something* in it, oblivious of the fact that a just appreciation of the values and proportions of life only comes of pondering and meditation, and that some quiet and leisure is needed for the consideration of what we are, why we are doing all this, and to what end. And yet we are wrong. The complexity of our modern industrial and commercial systems reveals nothing so much as that

whole groups and classes of men are sharply divided by interest and prejudice, often indeed hostile to one another in life. And again, in life, what common bond is there between one of those typical drab, rusty, patient woman drudges one can see any day going to and fro from a dreary, monotonous home to an equally dreary toil, and the fine lady who rolls by in her carriage—a vision of delicate beauty, a triumph of artful adornment? These divisions, these contrasts, give rise to problems and questions without number, but there are many whom nothing in life can unite into a common brotherhood, a common understanding, save only the fact that all have to face a common future; while many questions and problems might lose something of their difficulty in consideration of the greatest problem in life, which is Death. Yet there are many, perhaps the majority of persons, who cannot bear to think of their end, who put the suggestion out of their minds, who will hardly admit the possibility as touching themselves.

And if we want to know the meaning of this, we cannot do better than turn to the thought of that wise old writer from whom I have taken the text. The bitterness lies in the thought of Death as the meddler, the disturber of what is good, and settled, and enjoyable. To the man that liveth at rest in his possessions Death is a robber. The successful

man lays his plans ; with care and labour he builds up the edifice of his fortune, and as he sits down to enjoy "the rest" which years have brought him, he knows that Death may come with ironical smile and touch all that substantial fortune—investments, lands, houses—and it will crumble to dust. The content that comes with easy circumstances, with a carefully-padded selfishness, with the absence of that constant worry which is the lot of the hard-driven ; the satisfaction with a scheme of existence which can ensure to one a well-fed, well-clad, easily-hung journey through life—all these are apt to resent the thought of Death as an intruder, a hard and pitiless meddler. And then, as the sage reminds us, there are the many persons who are yet "able to receive meat," who taste the full savour of material pleasures in the enjoyment of unbroken health, and naturally recoil from the thought of any interference in its harmonious working.

But there is another side—it is not all repellent. If Death seem to many to be the great intruder, for others it is the great consoler. If any dread the approach of Death, let him see what it offers to these others. To the needy in circumstance, a welcome respite from that grinding care which knows no cessation, which dogs the footsteps, and uses up the fine qualities of heart and soul in a weary effort to procure the means for a thankless

existence. To the needy in all the treasures of human affection and understanding, a welcome end to that most terrible burden of all, a loveless life. "Unto him whose strength faileth," in the constant watch for that opportunity which never comes as an outlet for unrecognized talent and unseen worth, the thought of Death is a renewal of hope, a soothing of the tired mind. To the old who have outlived their day and its usefulness, who drag on in the vexation of some humiliating infirmity, Death lends a dignity which they have lost. To those in whose veins sin and error have distilled the deadly poison of impatience and despair, Death is the antidote of life.

Life is for the strong, you say, for the steady-going, for the upright! Yes, but we are not all strong, and God in Heaven has a Divine compassion for His weak, tired, and erring creatures—the compassion of Death.

"Fear not the sentence of Death," says the wise man of old. It is only a blank and dreadful atheism which can fear it, for the measure of our relation to Death is not the measure of varying finite circumstance, but the constant measure of our infinite relations to Almighty God. "Remember them that come before thee and that come after thee; for this is the sentence of the Lord over all flesh." That countless multitude of human lives

of whom we are born, heirs of the ages, that greater multitude that must come after us, whose veins shall run with our blood, all of them by disease, by decay, by violence, passing through the same gate of Death to an unknown future beyond—what is the significance of that immovable fact to us of to-day? Surely it is this—that Death is the great unifying factor of life. In the Providence of God it is the one call above all others which we may not and cannot disregard or evade to something higher and better than we can know or find here. You who are at rest in your possessions, who are easy and prosperous, successful and healthy; would God permit Death the Intruder to disturb your contented acquiescence in this scheme of things, if He had not in store for you some greater life than this, needing greater powers than those of getting, spending, and enjoying, which perhaps the apprehension of Death alone can call out. You who are needy and tired and old and heartsick, would God have sent you into the world to endure this weary discipline all unasked, if compassionate Death were not the gate of an opportunity you have never known here. Only God holds the key of the mystery of Death, and Death for us is perhaps the key to the mystery of God.

“Fear not the sentence of Death.” Not without reason have I led your thoughts on this solemn

subject by the light of the wisdom of an ancient writer, who, inspired though he was as all wise men have been in every age, nevertheless did not give to his meditations the colour of any particular creed, but only spoke out of the rich experience of a mind trained to observe and understand the human heart and the vicissitudes of human existence. For just as in Death we are all one, irrespective of creed or belief, so our thoughts about it should be so wide and general as not to exclude any who believes in God and His Providence, whatever the degree of their knowledge, or the measure of their faith.

But we Christians, who preserve always in public rite as in private meditation, the reverent and thankful remembrance of the one great death, who hope ourselves to be faithful to our Lord in death, as we try to be true to Him in life, cannot exclude Him and what He has done for us from our meditations. Apart from circumstance, apart from the bitterness of parting from all known and safe things, from all that we hold dear, apart from the thankful laying down of a burden that is too great, there is always, and must be, a special fear, an awe and trembling when we lie waiting for the great change. All those who have stood by a dying friend, and watched, in baffled understanding and impotent longing to help; any one of us who in severe illness may have known what it is to look Death in

the face, and feel his awful presence on the threshold of our door, know in what that fear lies. It is the freezing loneliness, the isolation, in that hour in which the most tender care, the most loving sympathy, must fail to reach the parting human soul, hedged around by the unseen but impenetrable barrier of Death.

Everyone knows that marvellous picture, "Love and Death," by one of our greatest modern painters. In the foreground the tremendous icy figure of Death, swathed from head to foot in formless draperies, with bowed head and outstretched arm, as he sweeps up the steps to demand his age-long right. In the background is the open door of a sick room, and the way of Death is barred by the little pathetic child form of Love, giving way, step by step, to the irresistible advance of the destroyer—shrinking with horror, yet summoning up all the powers of a loving courage to look straight into the fearful face of Death. It is a pictured parable suggesting many meanings, but this one surely above all, that only Love can bear to look into the face of Death.

And so we may never forget that Supreme Love which for us has looked full into the terrible face of Death, suffering the panic loneliness, tasting the concentrated bitterness, that we who are His might never know the full horror of separation from God ;

that in this last dread hour, when all human supports have fallen away, we might have the strong and sure support of His rod and staff as we cross the valley of the shadow—even that Viaticum which is His own blessed Presence. When our time comes, may we have the strength to pray, "Suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from Thee."

The face of Death is towards the Sun of Life,
His shadow darkens earth; his truer name
Is 'Onward,' no discordance in the roll
And march of that Eternal Harmony
Whereto the worlds beat time, tho' faintly heard
Until the great Hereafter. Mourn in hope!"

THE END.

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